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THE MARQUIS OF CARABAS

THE
MARQUIS OF CARABAS

A Story of To-day

BY
AARON WATSON
AND
LILLIAS WASSERMANN



IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III.

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THE MARQUIS OF CARABAS

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MARQUIS SHOWS 'TRUE NOBILITY OF MIND.'

THE Marquis of Carabas had chanced, through some accident, to call at Park Lane at an unwonted hour of the day ; with the result that instead of meeting with Lady Ermyntrude or the Duchess, who had gone out together, he fell into the hands of Lady Nora, who, without any distinct purpose, had obstinately insisted on remaining at home.

'Oh,' she said, 'I am so glad that you have called just at this moment, for it is so

difficult to see you alone, and I have wanted to say something to you for ever so long.'

These two treated each other as if they were already members of the same family. The forthcoming marriage had so long been a settled, an irrevocable thing, that with the members of the Dundridge family, Lady Ermyntrude excepted, the Marquis was on as familiar and close terms as if it had already taken place. In Lady Ermyntrude's case familiarity was not easy, or, indeed, possible. Even with her lover, of whom she was undisguisedly proud, she retained a certain stiffness and formality; she delighted, also, in a like decorous reserve on his own part, as if it would be unpatrician to unbend. Faultily faultless, icily regular, was Lady Ermyntrude. Most men would as soon have wooed a statue of Diana. But according to the Marquis's estimation of her she was one in whom all perfections met.

With Lady Nora ease and familiarity

were unavoidable ; it was that or nothing. Lord Carabas felt towards her as feels a grave man who is drawn into sporting with a kitten. He did not understand her in the least, but she pleased and amused him, and he liked her heartily, perhaps all the more because she was in such almost comical contrast to her surroundings. But to-day Lady Nora was not sportive, but grave.

‘I have been wishing to speak to you,’ she said, ‘about that unfortunate young man to whom it is possible I owe the fact that I am able to speak to you at all. He is in prison. Can’t you do something for him? You are a powerful man with the Government: could you not procure his liberty if you chose?’

‘Let us sit down,’ said the Marquis. ‘You are rather excited, are you not?’

He felt a rising excitement in himself. It seemed as if the blood must have rushed to his face, and the proposal to be seated—Lady Nora having delivered herself, with

her hand placed pleadingly on his arm, almost as soon as he entered the room—was, in fact, a device for hiding his suddenly-stirred emotion from the keen eyes of the girl.

‘I am forgetting,’ she said, her manner at once chilled. ‘You were one of the chief witnesses against him.’

‘But you must not suppose, my dear Nora, that I am the less inclined to help him on that account. In giving such evidence as I did, I was discharging a public duty, and it was a duty which it was impossible to avoid.’

‘And you will help him, then?’

‘If I were convinced that he deserved help, I decidedly would, as you wish it; but are you quite sure, dear Nora, that he is really one of the deserving?’

‘Oh, you are thinking of that wretched Irishman! He was an impostor, as I always felt that he was. That is what I wanted to tell you most.’

Then Nora began to unfold her story. The Marquis learned with great surprise that she had frequently been a visitor at the Deans'.

'And that poor Jacob Dean has such a dear little crippled daughter,' she said—'quite a wonderful child, with scarcely a body at all, and the strangest mind, I think, that can ever have been known. Her aunt, the unfortunate young man's mother, is a simple, homely soul ; not very shrewd, but, I am sure, as good as good can be. They both worship that poor boy. I wish you could hear what they say, and how indignant they were that Bertie, as they call him, could have sent anyone to ask for money on his behalf.'

'That is only natural, of course. Probably they know nothing about the circumstances. However, let us suppose, Nora, that there was no Irishman in connection with the affair. Let us suppose that Thady never ran away with you, and that no young

paladin of a workman hurried to your rescue——’

‘Oh,’ said Nora, interrupting him, ‘I cannot suppose that! It is quite impossible for me to suppose anything of the kind.’

‘Well, I will suppose that you suppose it,’ the Marquis went on, with a playfulness that corresponded ill with his feelings. ‘You must surely be aware that there are circumstances quite apart from these occurrences which must make it difficult for me to interfere in this young man’s behalf. Do you not know that he has set up a claim to my title and estates?’

‘Oh dear, oh dear!’ exclaimed Lady Nora, in a tone of real distress; ‘and so that is what Ermyntrude and my mother meant! They speak as if one knew all about everything, which just puzzles me. But surely what you say cannot be true!’

‘Why, it has all been in the newspapers, Nora.’

‘But I never read newspapers, and

nobody confides in me, and I haven't seen Cran for ever so long; and so I am almost as ignorant as can be.'

'Well, let me be your newsmonger for once, then,' said the Marquis. 'The fact is that your hero, on the strength, so far as I can discover, of bearing the same name as my family, has set up a claim to be the son of the late Marquis of Carabas (you knew him when you were quite a little thing as Lord Bexley). Of course, if the claim were sustained it would turn me out—I should become Mr. Nobody. And in order to sustain it, societies of Socialistic working men have been formed, subscriptions have been obtained, lawyers have been employed, and a notice of the claim has been served on my solicitors. There you have the whole story, and you perceive what sort of person it is that you are asking me to help.'

Lady Nora was quite silenced. There was, she felt, nothing to be said. It ap-

peared as impossible to her as it did to her sister that this extraordinary claim could have any foundation in fact; and Lady Ermyntrude treated it with a superb disdain, as if it were not even worth thinking about. The sympathy of society in general, indeed, went with the Marquis of Carabas. He would be put to a great deal of expense by a rank imposture. Such was the observation usually made in West-End drawing-rooms. That a mere mechanic should turn out to be a Marquis was incredible. It had been well known that Lord Bexley was a man of low tastes; 'but even he,' said the Duchess of Dundridge, 'could not have *married* in the slums.'

The Marquis of Carabas, on the other hand, was becoming uneasily conscious that he was bearing a title and enjoying wealth that did not belong to him. He had spoken quite honestly in the police-court at first, when he had been questioned as to Bertie Shelburne's possible relationship to himself.

The questions, unexpectedly put, had been frankly answered. The suggestion that the prisoner was his relative seemed at that moment of surprise absurd. It was not till he had stepped down from the witness-box that a doubt assailed him. The papers that had been forwarded to him by Mr. Tidd then came to his mind. In the time that had elapsed since their destruction they had been, if not forgotten, at least deprived of their terrors. Everything had seemed to be made so safe by that simple act of committing them to the fire that the Marquis had suffered little further disturbance of mind. But, assuming them to be genuine—and, after all, he had only Mr. Tidd's word for it, as he now told himself—it was certain that Bexley had a son somewhere or other. Suppose this young man Shelburne should be the son in question? It was odd, but in going through the papers he had not noted the name of the woman whom Bexley had married. Perhaps he

had been too hasty. The coming into his hands of a revelation so unexpected had disquieted him so much as to make him only half conscious of what he did. It was Lady Ermyntrude who filled all the foreground of his thoughts at that critical time. He had acted almost as much on impulse as from deliberate intention. So he said to himself now. It had undoubtedly been his duty to hunt up that boy of Bexley's, if he still lived. He had not only neglected that responsibility, but had destroyed his own means of identification. The folly—nay, the criminality—of the act struck him with such force as he left the court that he fell back into the corner of his brougham like a man stunned.

Was there ever yet a man who possessed a sense of justice so exacting and an unselfishness so extreme that, being in the position of the Marquis of Carabas, he would have hastened to forestall the desire of one who wished to supplant him? Such an embodied

conscience would be scarcely human. It is never expected of those whose interests are threatened that they shall coolly make investigation into the facts, satisfy themselves as to the rights and wrongs of the case, and then surrender at discretion. The saying that 'possession is nine points of the law' expresses the ordinary attitude of mankind towards such claims as those which were threatened on Bertie Shelburne's behalf. The actual possessor would be considered quixotic, or something worse, if he did not fight. Nobody expects him to yield, except to the decision of the legal tribunals.

The Marquis of Carabas may be accepted as a good representative of the average man, except as regards one important circumstance. What would the average man have done with that parcel of papers which Mr. Marc Aurelius Tidd had taken the pains to bring with him from the ice-cold wilds of Alaska? Would he have put them in the fire, as the Marquis of Carabas had done?

Probably not, for he would have considered that they could not thus be finally disposed of. In all likelihood he would have put them in a drawer, proposing to wait for developments.

The peculiarity of the Marquis's position was this destruction of important documents confided to him by one who had apparently believed and trusted in his honour. If he had returned them, questioned their authenticity, defied whoever held them to assail him by the recognised processes of law, nobody would have blamed him. His conduct, indeed, would have seemed equally natural and right. But by burning the papers he had committed an act which, should it become known, would destroy his character as a man of honour, and even expose him to consequences reaching beyond the loss of a reputation which was based to a considerable extent on a straightforward manliness by which he had always hitherto been distinguished.

He felt now, writhing under the first public suggestion of Bertie Shelburne's relationship to himself, that he had committed an incredible act of folly. He would actually be weakened in his defence against any claim that might be made by the fact that he had destroyed documents which might have helped his case. How could he reply to questions on the subject, supposing such questions were ever to be asked? He must either perjure himself or make confession. In the one case he must sink in his own esteem, and in the other he must lose, and lose irrevocably, the respect of the world.

Perhaps the whole of these considerations did not pass through his mind as he drove homeward from the police court; but such as did not then do so presented themselves all the more powerfully after the subsequent trial. There was no reason at first to think that the questions put by Bertie Shelburne's counsel were founded on anything more substantial than a daring impertinence; but

before long such reasons had presented themselves as pointed to another conclusion. His solicitors, as a result of such inquiries as it was possible to make, assured him that the claim was not without seriousness.

‘It will put you to a great deal of inconvenience, and cost you a great deal of money,’ said the chief member of the eminent firm; ‘but of course you will fight it out?’

‘Oh, certainly I shall fight it out. Who would think of giving way to an impudent pretence of this kind?’

‘Nobody, I am sure, my lord. I do not mean to suggest any surrender. I take it for granted not only that you will fight, but that you will win. I merely await your instructions to make all necessary arrangements. Fortunately for us, the young man is in prison. That will inevitably be a cause of delay, such as will enable us to push our inquiries to the utmost limits. It is a very fortunate thing indeed, I am sure.’

The Marquis of Carabas winced under the

words. He had his own reasons for thinking that inquiry might not strengthen his defence, and the fact that Bertie Shelburne was in prison was only a cause for mingled satisfaction. It might be said afterwards that he had himself put and kept him there.

When he left Lady Nora, on the occasion of the conversation with which this chapter opens, it was with a determination to see the Home Secretary. Though he had indicated no feeling on the subject, Nora's pleading for her hero had suggested a proceeding which must place him in a very favourable light should the affair be successful. He would ask for the remission of at least a large part of Bertie Shelburne's sentence.

'It is a most extraordinary request, coming from you,' said the Home Secretary; 'the most extraordinary I ever heard of! Why, the fellow is claiming your title and estates, and you want him out of gaol—so that he can fight you the more easily, I suppose! I shall be a better friend to you than

you are to yourself : I shall keep him where he is. I perceive nothing in his case that calls for any merciful consideration. These Socialist fellows are becoming a great danger to the State. But your intercession for him does you great honour ; it does, upon my soul !

This was just the observation that the Marquis of Carabas expected to hear. It was necessary to him that he should appear to treat his antagonist as generously as circumstances would permit. This visit to the Home Secretary was an act of diplomacy of which he would not formerly have thought himself capable. And that member of the Government talked of it glowingly, eloquently, to all whom he encountered ; so that the story of the Marquis's intercession for the claimant to his estates got into the papers. Even the *Drury Lane Review* took note of and praised it. ' Whatever may be the result of the pending claim,' it said, ' the Marquis of Carabas has shown that he is capable of true nobility of mind.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MARQUIS ENTERTAINS AT BEXLEY HOUSE.

THE season had been over for some time, and yet the wedding of the Marquis of Carabas and Lady Ermyntrode Challoner had not taken place. It was, in fact, deferred until the end of December, and then the happy pair proposed to take a long honeymoon in Italy and the Riviera, perhaps extending their travels to Egypt and the Holy Land before the Parliamentary session began.

Meanwhile the Marquis was entertaining a select party at Bexley House, with his sister, Lady Villiers, in the capacity of hostess. It was long since the old place had been so gay and so full of company.

A deep gloom had hung over it since the death of the old Marquis—a gloom difficult to dispel even under the influence of the fresh young life now surging and eddying about its sombre halls and echoing corridors.

The present owner had visited the place only once since his accession, and he retained a vivid and unpleasant remembrance of his feelings on that occasion.

The figure of the lonely old man who had lived so joyless a life and died so sudden a death seemed to rise before him at every turn. If he entered the breakfast-room suddenly he fancied that he could see the shrunken yet rigid form sitting in drooping and despondent attitude in the big arm-chair—a scene which had been described to him by those who knew all the wretched story. A sensation of sadness and of mental suffering weighted the very air of the place. When he took his seat, as was expected of him, in the village church, he carefully

avoided the family pew. Nothing would have induced him to shut himself up there, away from the rest of the worshippers, behind those terrible velvet curtains, and in the very spot where his predecessor had died in silent agony.

The housekeeper, who had been retained in the family, and who had disappointed Mr. Farnley's matrimonial hopes by preferring a snug sinecure and a tidy pension in prospect to the hard work and responsibilities of a hotel-keeper's wife (for Mr. Farnley had satisfied his ambition, and become the proprietor of the Red Lion at Stowbridge), was not surprised that the Marquis did not make a longer stay.

'It's doleful for *us* sometimes, Mr. Clark,' she remarked to the new Marquis's gentleman confidentially; 'but then we haven't to live in those great rooms by ourselves. When his lordship marries, and has a family about him, it'll be all right, and the ghosts—for, you know, there is no end of ghosts

at Bexley, Mr. Clark, though we don't talk of them outside these precincts—well, the ghosts will all give place, and retire to the disused portions of the house, when little feet go scampering up and down the corridors. But I wouldn't advise the Marquis to take up his residence here—that is to say, permanently—until he has the companionship of a sweet young lady, such as I hear Lady Ermyntrode Challoner is.'

Mr. Clark was of a very different character to the man who had preceded him as gentleman's gentleman in the household of the former Marquis. He was younger by twenty years than Mr. Farnley, but he was a good deal more than twenty years that person's senior in worldly wisdom and cynicism. He shrugged his shoulders now at Mrs. Mason's remarks, and spread out his hands with a gesture he had caught up during a Parisian engagement.

'Ah, yes! It is *triste*, deplorably *triste*, in this old château. But then, my dear

madam, one needs not to stay here. One can always run up to town when one feels out of sorts. But marriage? Ah, that is a different matter. One cannot always run away from *that* when one feels dull.'

'I should venture to hope that no person of well-regulated mind would ever wish to behave so improperly,' said Mrs. Mason, with lofty displeasure.

But Mr. Clark was a confident young man, of a distinctly modern type, and declined to perceive a snub. He merely laughed and shrugged his shoulders again.

'But persons of well-regulated minds are in the minority,' he remarked lightly. 'Most of us are so very, very human, and do so abhor anything in the shape of a bond. Now, if limited marriage were established, as it may very probably be ere long,' he went on musingly, for he was a young man who prided himself upon being of a well-informed mind, and made a point of reading up all the social topics of the day, 'the

objections would not be so entirely insurmountable. But——'

At this point the housekeeper's capstrings rustled again with the tremor of indignant propriety that possessed her. She interrupted him with considerable austerity.

'That will do, Mr. Clark. Whatever may be your opinions and your—your code of morality, I must beg and beseech you to keep them to yourself; at any rate, while you reside within these walls.'

'My dear Mrs. Mason, why this indignation? I mean no harm, I do assure you! If one may not allude to a subject that has been before the public day by day for the last year or two, and which, by the way, was introduced in the first instance by one of your own sex, pray, what is one to talk about?'

Mr. Clark was genuinely surprised at the attitude of the housekeeper.

The lady's-maids with whom he was wont to associate did not at all object to listen

while he ventilated his opinions and theories. Sometimes they would give a little shriek when these were more outrageous than usual, and say, with a pretty shudder, ‘Lor, Mr. Clark, how you *do* go on!’ But, then, he flattered himself that they really liked it on the whole, being of the same belief as Pope, that ‘every woman is at heart a rake.’ At any rate, there was always a sort of pleasure and excitement in shocking their sensitive feminine nerves by daring statements, especially when, as he had said to Mrs. Mason, he knew that he meant no harm. He was, indeed, by no means an immoral young man, but simply a young man who liked to make shocking statements, and to feel that he was attracting his full share of attention.

But Mrs. Mason belonged to the old school, which preferred—while such euphuism was possible—to call a spade an implement of manual agriculture. To her this young man was a revelation, and one of no

pleasant kind. The fact was that she took him more seriously than he took himself, and marked him dangerous where he was simply talkative. Therefore, she resolved that while he stayed at Bexley House it would be her bounden duty to redouble her vigilance, and to look after the maids herself with exceeding closeness, especially such of them as possessed any pretensions to good looks.

It would have flattered Mr. Clark's vanity had he known with what a Don Juan-like character Mrs. Mason credited him ; but there was no foundation in fact for any such extraordinary opinion.

Now, in the beginning of October, the house was most certainly lively enough to drive away the ghosts.

Lady Villiers was completely in her element as hostess. She was young, good-looking, and lively, and fate had dealt rather cruelly by her in tying her in the heyday of her youth and freshness to a man who hated

society, and who would have been content to live the life of a recluse without any of a recluse's consolations, for Sir Reginald Villiers disliked nature and books almost as much as he disliked people.

But Lady Villiers indisputably knew how to amuse herself when she did get the opportunity.

It goes without saying that the Duchess of Dundridge did not like this lively sister of the Marquis ; but, then, the views of her Grace were decidedly of an antique and primitive character. She held the frisky matron of modern days in utter abhorrence ; and Laura Villiers approached that type too nearly to be approved.

‘ You may say what you like, but Laura’s just as nice as ever she can be ! ’ exclaimed Lady Nora Challoner, defending her new friend from the adverse maternal criticism. ‘ She is perfectly natural, and therefore perfectly well-bred.’

‘ How absurdly you reason, Nora ! ’ said

Lady Ermyntrude coldly. 'A South Sea Islander, who laughs at all the restraints of civilization, can scarcely be considered a model of good breeding.'

'Nora is a foolish, ignorant child, or she would never venture to flaunt her opinions in the faces of those who are older and wiser than herself. But you honour her too much by condescending to reason with her, Ermy. I think the proper method is to take no notice of her.'

Lady Nora ought to have felt abundantly contrite at such a pronounced 'setting down.' But she merely shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

The young creature was developing rapidly, and in a manner that caused much anxiety to her august mamma. She appeared to be thinking out the problems of life for herself, and the result of such thinking might evidently be disastrous. Every now and again she would state some opinion entirely at variance with the creed of that

portion of society in which fate had placed her. It was wrong of girls to use their brains in any direction but those pointed out by their parents and guardians.

There was only one consolation. It would soon be Lord Cranbery's duty to guide and influence this too-daring young soul. For her part, the Duchess would not be sorry to be relieved of such a terrible responsibility. Meantime Lord Cranbery looked anything but happy in the prospect.

He had accepted the invitation of the Marquis to join the house-party at Bexley, but for all the good he was when there he might as well have stayed away.

He moped and pined, and did whatever anyone told him to do, without the slightest interest in doing it. The Duchess watched him uneasily. It was rather hard on her that both these young people should be worrying her at the same time, and that she did not dare to confide her anxiety to anyone—not even to her favourite daughter. Rumours

of a very disquieting character had reached her ears, and she did not know whether to abuse philanthropy or Transatlantic enterprise the most.

Lady Nora laughed at Cran's melancholy looks, as she laughed at most things, but they set her thinking, nevertheless. She used to look at him in a puzzled and reflective manner sometimes, when he had lapsed into one of his reveries. And Lady Nora was a very shrewd and clever young person, despite what the Duchess called her inexperience.

'You are the dullest company I ever had to endure, Cran,' she would say in her blunt, straightforward fashion. 'I wish folks wouldn't leave us so much alone together. I suppose they think we like it, but I'm sure we don't. Heigh-ho! I wish daddy was here to go out riding with, or that I was back at home. I'm just bored to death in this place, and that's a fact!'

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN AMATEUR GIPSY.

MARKET-DAY at Stowbridge was rather an important affair, for the village lay in the centre of a great agricultural county, and farm and garden produce was brought from far and near to be sold there. It was a pretty and picturesque scene when the dull, sleepy market-place was alive with groups of busy people ; with rows of stalls, where flowers and fruit were sold at fabulously low prices ; with its quaint old butter-cross, where still the country-women sat on the steps with their baskets of butter and eggs ; and with the square tower of the church overtopping the village gables.

Lord Cranbery was always unlucky, always blundering, always doing things at awkward times and in wrong places, he thought rather sadly, as he followed close in Lady Nora's wake — stopping when she stopped to interchange a few sentences with such of the farmers' wives and daughters as she had come to know by sight, praising their butter or laughingly asking for a setting of their famous eggs.

Lady Nora was in her element. The women were delighted with her shrewd remarks and her good humour; the men thought that fate had surely made a blunder in planting her in so high a station.

At the end of the row of stalls she suddenly paused, and caused Lord Cranbery to pause also.

'Here is something in your line,' she exclaimed in a merry tone; 'a travelling Æsculapius — no less! Perhaps he may be able to cure your fit of the blues, Cran?'

A young man of florid complexion and stout build was mounted upon a wooden chair, talking and gesticulating with so much vehemence as to seriously imperil his own safety, for the aforesaid chair, being of fragile construction, threatened to collapse under his stormy eloquence.

‘I am no humbug, ladies and gentlemen,’ he cried, in a stentorian voice ; ‘no quack or impostor, I can assure you ! I have passed at college both as doctor of medicine and F.R.C.S. You can see my diplomas at any time you choose. They are good, honest, English diplomas, not Yankee swindles, bought at so much apiece. I tell you all here that I am a licentiate of surgery of London University. You may believe me or not, but it’s truth I’m speaking. And why am I in this position to-day, you will ask ? Why, because I am not a humbug and a quack, to be sure ! That’s plain speaking. Nobody will believe in a man that’s frank and honest—at least, not in my

profession. I can't live by my profession, then, not in the ordinary way, so I've struck out a line for myself. If I set up a grand carriage which I didn't pay for, and told a lot of lies about folk's ailments, I might be a doctor to the Royal Family—who knows? But I'm above that sort of thing. I'm an honest man, and I'm proud of it. To all I say, Try me! No cure, no fee. There, that's fair enough, isn't it? I will write you a prescription gratis for every ill that flesh is heir to, and you can take it over yonder to the chemist's and see if it's genuine. It isn't every day you have the chance of advice from an M.D. for nothing, so look alive, and tell me what ails you!

The chair creaked and groaned under the speaker's energetic movements, but the rustics hung back, grinning and nudging each other.

'There's a splendid speaker for you!' said Lady Nora admiringly. 'Come, Ruth Tykes,

why don't you go and have a prescription for your rheumatism ?

But Ruth Tykes, a ponderously-fat specimen of good living, chuckled inwardly in a manner that shook her fat sides.

‘Ah dunno b’leeve in anything but what one pays down coin for, Lady Nora,’ she said. ‘Stuff that’s given away cannot be good for owt. What dosta say, Isaac ?’

The Methodist ’cello-player shook his head also.

‘If yow’d come to our prayer-meetings, Sister Tykes, and hev faith, that ’ud do yo’ a heap more good, both spiritually and for yore bodily ailments. Yo’ known as how a grain o’ faith ’ud move mahntens.’

‘An’ dost ta liken me to a mahnten, Isaac ?’ asked the fat woman, with a humorous twinkle in her eyes. ‘Hear him, Lady Nora, how he howds me up to ridicule, ’cause natur has gi’en me the substance and him the shadder !’

There might have been more of this interchange, but just then a very flashy-looking waggonette had driven up close to the M.D., and the occupant, a stout, middle-aged negro, stood up and surveyed the eloquent speaker with what was intended for superb disdain, varied by expressive shrugs of the shoulders and grins, that displayed to great advantage a huge set of ivories of dazzling whiteness.

The negro was very smartly attired in a white waistcoat and a swallow-tailed coat, and held in his hand a small red bottle, which he raised up and shook in the faces of the crowd.

When the previous speaker stopped, and began to wipe his heated brow, down which the beads of perspiration were rolling, the negro took up the parable.

‘ Now, gentlemen—ladies and gentlemen, I should say—I tink it’s about time for me to have a cut in ! Turn and turn about is fair play. First of all, I want to declare, on

de word of a negro gentleman, dat I am not confedrical wid any pusson here present. I don' mean to pass any disparagement remarks about any other pusson ; I only want you to understand dat I am not confedrical wid dem. I don' give no pieces of paper wid Latin prescriptions. What's the use of Latin prescriptions to a working man ? He wants to get rid of his aches and his pains fust ting, doesn't he ? Well, my name's J. Anderson, and what I say I mean. I've got no deeplovers nor no degrees, but when I say I can cure you, I am speaking off the book. But it is wid dis little bottle hyar, and not wid scraps of paper. Dere's somefing to look at in dis red bottle, isn't der ? Well, but I am no humbug eider, and I don't pretend to cure you for noting. I must live as well as you, and how am I to live if I give you my brains and the result of my scien-ti-fic riskoveries and disearches away widout getting money for dem ? No, no ! J. Anderson is no fool, and he doesn't

talk to fools eider ! Noting for noting in dis world ! Pillanthropy is all bery well, but it won't fill my empty pockets, nor give me a good dinner.'

Again he held up the red bottle and looked at it admiringly.

'Dis bottle is worf its weight in gold, but I will give it you for four dollars ; dat is, tree shillings and sixpence in your money. It will cure rheumatism, skyatica, nooralgiar, and all de other algiars dat ever inflicted humanity. What is de matter with you ?' he asked with sudden sharpness, as a man, afflicted apparently with excessive pain in his hip, crawled up and held out his hand for the bottle.

The negro stooped down and looked him in the face for a moment, then shook his head scornfully.

'Go home, sar,' he exclaimed, with emphasis, 'and tank de Almighty for not making you what you pretend to be, a cripple. No, sar ; J. Anderson is not a

humbug ; he is not to be played wid. You can walk as straight as me, sar !

A laugh greeted the discomfited joker as he retreated ignominiously from the field.

‘ You are casting a longing glance at that wonderful red bottle, Cran,’ whispered Lady Nora. ‘ Confess, now, that you are tempted again to experiment upon yourself.’

Lord Cranbery laughed, but did not deny the impeachment.

‘ Well, Nora, one couldn’t do one’s self much harm, surely, with an *outward* application. And since I have been sleeping so badly my neuralgia has returned.’

Lady Nora placed her hand within his arm, and gently, but with great firmness, drew him outside the charmed circle.

‘ No, you don’t, Cran ! Not while under my care, at any rate. Remember the pills you had from Koofah, and the disastrous results that accrued therefrom. Leave the red bottle to the tough skins of the agricul-

tural population, and come with me to breathe the fresh air of Bartridge Edge instead.'

With considerable reluctance Lord Cranbery broke from the fascinating eloquence of the negro quack.

'Who knows whether it might not have cured my neuralgia, and given me back my sleep, Nora?' he murmured rebelliously. 'It is a well-known fact that these coloured races are versed in natural medicinal lore. From generation to generation such knowledge is handed down as a valuable inheritance, and in declining to participate in the good results——'

'Now, Cran, don't break out into philosophy, or I'll give you up to be preyed on in turn by English and nigger impostors! It's fresh air you want, not physic—fresh air, and a mind at rest,' she finished in a low voice, which Lord Cranbery did not hear.

'Well, well, you are as arbitrary in your way as the Duchess is in hers,' he said. 'I

always had to give in to you, even when you were a little mite in pinafores. Do you recollect how you beat me about the head with your little fist because I gave your doll, Rose, away to a beggar-girl who was crying in the street ?

‘ And very cool it was of you, too, I do declare ! But, after all, I dare say that’s not unusual with philanthropists. They are unjust to individuals in order that they may be generous to the race.’

‘ But I saved up my pocket-money and bought you another doll, Nora. Come, now, I wasn’t so selfish as all that !’

‘ Another doll ? Oh yes ! But, then, the other doll wasn’t my old Rose, whom I had grown to love the more as she lost hair and eyes and limbs in turn. I cried myself to sleep for a week after I lost her, I can tell you.’

‘ Poor little mite ! I forgive you my beating, then, because of the suffering by which it was produced.’

Lady Nora turned into a path to the left, which led through some fields and a plantation, then towards some rising ground, until it brought them out upon a wide stretch of high-lying moorland overlooking the valley of the Wyrne. The air sharpened here; a plover flew before them with a plaintive wail, and Lady Nora, taking off her hat, ran her fingers through her short curls and appeared to breathe more freely.

‘How nice it is up here on Bartridge Edge!’ she said, with a sort of rapture; ‘I feel as though I were choking for the want of fresh air sometimes down in Bexley House. Cran, nature certainly made a mistake with me. I was meant for a gipsy, for I never feel entirely happy except in the open air.’

Under the brilliant autumnal sunshine the moor wore its brightest aspect. Gone was the transient beauty of the purple heather-bloom, gone all the short-lived wild-flowers of the summer. But the ruddy

gold of the bracken spread far and wide, like a shimmering sea. The white-stemmed birches studding the moor burgeoned with dropping gold; the dewdrops glistened upon the silver threads of gossamer woven around each stem and leaf, and here and there a gorgeous autumn butterfly hovered over the heads of thistle or of yellow ragwort.

Lady Nora sat down upon a gray boulder, and looked up at her silent companion.

‘If I *were* a gipsy, in very truth, Cran dear, would you let me tell your fortune?’ she asked, in a curiously gentle way.

Lord Cranbery tried to smile, but his attempt was a signal failure.

‘You forget that I’m a member of the Society for the Suppression of Superstition, Nora,’ he answered.

‘Never mind that! Try to fancy that you are credulous and weak-minded, and let me read the lines of your hand. Nay, but you must act according to precedent, and

cross my hand with silver. Now, sir, I am ready !

She raised his palm to the light, and scrutinized it with much gravity.

‘ Ah, it is just as I suspected ! The line of love is crossed by the line of duty. Venus is in opposition to Minerva. There are two courses open to you. Your future and the future of many dear to you depends upon the one you now choose. You must not hesitate. Follow the dictates of your heart, or you will ruin two, perhaps three, lives——’

‘ What nonsense is this, Nora ?’ asked Lord Cranbery, crimsoning to the roots of his hair, and vainly endeavouring to withdraw his hand.

‘ No nonsense at all, but a mere statement of real facts,’ answered Lady Nora. Then, throwing his hand from her, she stood upright and faced him, with a look of righteous indignation in her honest eyes.

‘ Lord Cranbery,’ she said, in a voice he

scarcely recognised, so fraught was it with intense emotion, 'what have I done to you that you should seek to injure me so irremediably ?'

'Injure you, Nora ? Heaven forbid !'

'Is it no injury to a woman to marry her when you do not love her—when you never can love her, because your heart is no longer free ? Oh, Cran, Cran ! I did not think it of you ! You might have been straight with me, and told me the truth.'

Once again she was the girl he knew so well, his little playmate of past years, appealing to her boy cousin as she had been wont to do in their youthful differences.

'How do you know, Nora ? Who has told you ?' he asked guiltily, and yet with a certain vague sense of relief.

'How do I know ? Do you take me for a fool, Cran ? Trust a girl for finding out when her lover is thinking of another woman instead of herself. Not that you were ever much of a lover, either !'

‘But you are such a child!’ stammered Lord Cranbery.

‘Oh yes; there you go! You are like all the rest. It’s always that! If I ask mamma anything, it is always, “You are such a child!” “You are too young to know such things!” I grow to hate the very words. And the fact is that I see a great deal more than people fancy. I see how they can manœuvre, and scheme, and lie, to gain their ends, and it makes me just savage. I am too young for everything but to be made miserable, it seems, and—and to have my chance of happiness taken away from me.’

She ended with something that sounded like a sob, and then shook her head with an angry gesture, perhaps to hide the tear that stole down her round cheek, and of which she was a trifle ashamed. Lord Cranbery’s heart smote him. He had never credited his cousin with feelings so intense.

‘Don’t talk like that, Nora,’ he said,

putting his arm around her waist, and being repelled by her instantly, with sudden indignation. 'I haven't been so false as you think, dear! I have never said a word of love to any other woman—never, whatever—however I may have been tempted!'

'Just as if that mattered! Now, Cran, once for all, be honest with me, and everything may yet come right. Do you think I care a fig for you in that way? You do make me so cross! I don't *want* to marry you. That's plain speaking, isn't it? Never did. There now! And certainly wild horses wouldn't drag me to it now! The question we've got to consider is this: How are we to get out of this ridiculous engagement? Couldn't you just go and tell mamma that you've changed your mind?'

Lord Cranbery did not respond with any alacrity to this suggestion.

'I—I feel a little nervous about it, Nora dear. The Duchess can make one appear

such a cad ! She's got a—a way with her, you know !

His cousin laughed. However, she did not wonder at poor Cran's hesitation. The picture of her maternal parent cornering the poor young fellow with her majestic presence, and overpowering him with her lofty eloquence, presented itself in a very forcible manner to her mind. No ; she herself would require to step into the breach and to face the foe. But she could not help rallying him a little on the subject.

'I'm afraid you are a moral coward, Cran,' she said laughingly ; 'you would rather marry me—for whom you don't care a jot—than face mamma and tell her the simple truth. Men are very poor creatures, after all,' observed this experienced young person, with supreme contempt for masculine weakness.

'You don't quite understand the situation, Nora,' pleaded Lord Cranbery patheti-

cally. 'It is so dishonourable in a man to break an engagement.'

'It is a thousand times more dishonourable to keep it after your fashion,' broke out Lady Nora indignantly. Then, with a condescending tenderness, as for some weak and feeble creature who must be gently treated, she went on :

'Never mind, Cran ! I will see you through it ! Leave it all to me. But first—because, though I am not in the least in love with you, you are my cousin, and I've got a sort of fondness for you all the same—tell me all about it. I'm just dying to be the confidante of a real, genuine love-story, such as I know yours must be.'

Thus adjured, and nothing loath, Lord Cranbery sat down beside Lady Nora upon a big boulder, and unfolded the tale of his feelings regarding Miss Celia Tidd.

It was late in the afternoon when the young people returned to Bexley House. They had missed their luncheon, but Nora

was quite content with a slice of brown bread and a glass of milk that Lord Cranberry had procured for her from a farmhouse on the moor.

As for the young nobleman, he was too happy and too excited to feel hungry.

The Duchess, usually such a martinet on the subject of propriety, chose to ignore their absence, and to make no remark to the culprits upon their tardy appearance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DUCHESS IS PERPLEXED.

BUT although the Duchess judged it diplomatic to leave well alone, or what appeared like well, the subsequent behaviour of the young truants puzzled her considerably.

What augury, for example, was she to gather from the fact that, from the date of that walk, a noticeable increase of familiarity was to be observed between them? Lady Nora, from treating her cousin upon all occasions with impatience and with bare civility, had in the most mysterious fashion veered round to the other extreme, and now welcomed, and even sought, his society with alacrity and evident pleasure.

It all promised very well for the success of the Duchess's plans, and yet—yet she had a lurking mistrust of appearances, an uneasy consciousness that there was something here the depths of which she could not fathom.

It was scarce within the bounds of probability that Lord Cranbery, her nephew, for whose qualities she entertained that cordial contempt which is bred of familiarity, should have so surpassed himself during that *tête-à-tête* as to have won at a bound the admiration and affection of her daughter, about whose sentiments there had previously been no ground for doubt. And yet there was the astounding fact that since that day these two, who had rather bored each other, were now inseparable.

There was a lurking devil in Lady Nora's eyes that added to the uneasiness of her mother. When this feeling at length grew to be intolerable, the Duchess made

an attempt to extract the information she wanted from her daughter.

They were alone together in the bed-chamber assigned to the Duchess, a stately room, well fitted to enshrine the stately form of its present occupant.

Her Grace—who knew from experience that her daughter could be very obstinate when she was so minded—was careful on this occasion to wear her least commanding aspect. But it was always extremely difficult for her to unbend. The very folds of soft cashmere composing her dressing-gown were wont to arrange themselves into a dignified severity when draped upon her majestic outlines, and there was a suggestion of judicial solemnity about the lace handkerchief for which she had laid aside her evening head-dress.

Lady Nora had been summoned to read to her, and had unfortunately yawned and stumbled over the dreary sermon, written by a bishop who was closely connected with

the Duchess's family. At any other time this lapse would have called down the severest reprimand upon her head ; but the girl could not help it. She had been out in the open air for the greater part of the day, and was wofully sleepy. Much to her astonishment, however, it was allowed to pass this time.

When the reading was over, Lady Nora kissed her mother, and would gladly have retired, but the Duchess waved her back in a regal manner.

‘Do not go yet, Nora,’ she said, with what was meant for a smile, but which was simply a contortion of the facial muscles ; ‘we haven’t had a talk together for ever so long, have we, dear ?’

Nora fidgeted, and looked as though she wished to escape.

‘I am so sleepy, mamma,’ she murmured, with a yawn.

‘Nonsense, child ! It is only eleven o’clock ; and I often hear Ermy and you

chattering long after this hour. But I suppose a mother's wishes are nothing—a mother must give way—a mother never need be considered ! Nora, I did not think you were so exceedingly selfish !

Thus adjured, the girl had no resource but to return, and to take the footstool at the Duchess's feet, whither she was directed by that lady.

‘ Do not blame me if I am poor company, mamma, that's all. I've been out all day, you know ; and Cran is getting quite into walking form under my training.’

‘ He is improving in every respect, I think, Nora — so much more manners, repose, *nous*—— He is quite entertaining, is he not ?’

‘ That is because he does not talk so much,’ said Nora in a drowsy tone.

But the drowsiness was in reality all gone by this time, and she was very much on the alert instead.

‘ You are trying to worm the secret out

of me, mamma dear,' she thought with some amusement; 'but it's no manner of use. I'm too young to be told your plans, perhaps, but I'm *not* too young to divine them, and even to thwart them sometimes. Just wait till I've got daddy to back me up !'

The Duchess looked at the girl from beneath her heavy eyebrows, and the wrinkle that furrowed her forehead in a straight line upward from her Roman nose grew very marked indeed.

'What do you mean by saying that he does not talk so much? What has happened between you?'

Lady Nora's clear blue eyes did not quail.

'You know he *did* use to bore one about his hobbies!' she exclaimed, 'and now he has grown silent about them. I, for one, think it is a great improvement.'

'At least, his hobbies were those of a gentleman,' said the Duchess.

Lady Nora, who was at any time almost

too ready to defend her father, took this speech for a reflection upon his tastes.

‘I don’t know that hob-nobbing with burglars and costermongers is any more gentlemanlike than looking after dear, clean-smelling horses and cows!’ she answered hotly.

‘You forget yourself, Nora,’ said the Duchess.

She would have liked to deliver a lecture to this impertinent daughter of hers, but with wonderful tact controlled her rising indignation.

‘To praise one person is not necessarily to hold another up to reprobation! It is your cousin, Lord Cranbery, who is the subject of discussion at present. I am pleased to observe that you appear on better terms with him than you were wont to be; and since you are not without common-sense, Nora, when you choose to exert it, I thought it might be because you had at last begun to appreciate his latent good

properties. He has certainly developed greatly during the past year.'

'In more ways than you dream of, dear mamma!' murmured Nora to herself. Aloud she contented herself with an emphatic assent. But the Duchess was fain to confess herself foiled.

She attempted afterwards to extract the meaning of the alliance from Lord Cranbery. That young nobleman, being of a simple and unsuspecting disposition, would have proved an easy victim to her majestic wiles had not Lady Nora adopted the precaution of setting him on his guard.

'Now, Cran, there must be no blabbing, mind, or I am done with you for ever! I simply cannot stand the life I should have here if I went contrary to mamma without daddy to back me up. I hate underhand ways, and I never kept a secret in my life before, that I know of; but this is a serious matter, and we should be beaten on this fighting-ground—we should indeed, Cran!

Leave it to me, there's a good boy, and I'll see you through.'

'But it's mean of me to hang back, and to let you bear all the firing!'

'Oh, I can bear it!' said Lady Nora laughingly; 'and I must and will have my old dad to stand up for me! He's the only person in the world that understands me, or gives me credit for having any brains or sense. "Your head's screwed on properly, Nora, whatever they may say!" that's what he tells me. But then he's—he's fond of me, and I don't believe anybody else is.'

'That's unkind, Nora! I'm ever so fond of you.'

'Oh! but that's only because I let you off marrying me. Not much of a compliment, that! But mind you don't forget my injunctions, Cran, or the game is up. If you allow so much as the tip of the domestic animal's tail to peep out of the bag, why, I'll—I'll insist upon our engagement being carried out to the bitter end;

and then the first thing after we're married I'll throw all your pill-boxes and physic-bottles behind the fire !

Under the influence of this terrible threat Cran became mute as an undertaker, and answered the Duchess's tentative remarks with plain 'Yeas' and 'Nays,' in a manner calculated to drive that wily manœuvrer to the verge of insanity. In brevity alone lay safety, and in brevity, therefore, Lord Cranbery sought refuge.

Foiled in all ways and on every hand, the Duchess was fain to hope for the best, and to trust in the power of her own strong will for the carrying out of her plans.

It was extremely difficult for Lady Nora to act a part, or to be anything but obtrusively frank and honest ; but in this case she was upheld by a sense of the importance of the interests at stake, and also in some degree by the amusement derived from thwarting her dear mamma's plans—a very naughty frame of mind for a well-brought-up girl to

arrive at; but then, as Lady Nora confessed, she was so full of original sin that it had to come out somehow.

Now and then she still got a trifle bored with Cran's love-story, for, sad though it be to have to acknowledge it, no woman can listen with unlimited patience to rhapsodies about another member of her own sex. After the first amused interest excited by Lord Cranbery's narrations had somewhat passed away, she grew tired of hearing the catalogue of Celia's charms repeated every hour of the day, and, indeed, a mischievous wish to discover a flaw in the idol cropped out in the course of time.

But Lord Cranbery was too simple to suspect anything of this kind. He did not understand how intolerant of perfection is poor humanity, especially when humanity is of the feminine persuasion, and how inevitably a feeling of antagonism arises in the heart of the listener towards the over-praised.

Once, after a long eulogistic statement concerning the fair American, Lady Nora, in a fit of impatience, rushed upstairs to her bedroom, three steps at a time, and sat down before the long swinging mirror there.

She looked for a long time at her own reflection, and then made a little grimace expressive of discontent.

‘If half Cran’s rhapsodies are to be credited, it’s no wonder that your nose was put out of joint, you funny, dumpy, commonplace, inelegant, *nice* little Nora,’ she exclaimed, with a laugh that brought all her pretty dimples into play ; ‘out of joint, indeed—such a nose ! Was it ever properly jointed, I’d like to know ? Oh, why didn’t nature give me a Grecian profile and a willowy figure, so that I should have had all the world at my feet, like that beautiful, fascinating, horrid Celia—whom I know I should hate, just because she’s everything I should be and am not !’

She turned again to the mirror, but this

time a more contented expression crept into her eyes.

‘Well, never mind, Nora, my dear, you’re not so very, very ugly, after all. Of course Cran couldn’t be expected to appreciate you, simply because he’s had your nice little face before him ever since he was a boy in frocks and you were a fat, wee baby. But I think—yes, I really think a stranger might not altogether dislike your appearance. Indeed, it is even possible that some—some weak-minded male creature might even go so far as to think you pretty, and to fall in love with your blue eyes and your dimples and your complexion. So be consoled, my child, and hear the catalogue of Celia’s charms with equanimity. In the meantime you’ve got to see the poor boy through his troubles. That’s your object in life at present.’

When the party returned to Sealands, the Duchess took care to carry Lord Cranbery along with them. She felt afraid to permit him to wander too far afield now, without

her vigilant eye to keep watch over his proceedings.

He did make a futile attempt to break the chain that bound him to her side. He murmured something of a meeting in town—a meeting for the benefit of distressed sempstresses, at which he had been asked to preside. But the Duchess imperatively vetoed any such proceeding.

For all she knew, that hateful American woman might also be in town. Did not she also profess philanthropy—for her own wicked purposes, doubtless—and an interest in all such benevolent movements? The Duchess had heard so, and grew suspicious of poor Cran's innocent meetings.

He knew no more than herself of Miss Tidd's movements. If they ever met again—an event of which he grew doubtful at times—it would have to be the work of fate, for no such meeting was or could be planned between them. It was probably this un-

certainty as to Celia's journeyings that was the primary occasion of Lord Cranbery's restless nights and consequent neuralgia, more than any cause purely physical.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MAN—OR THE MARQUIS ?

NEVER had the big entrance-hall of Bexley House appeared to greater advantage than upon a certain dull afternoon at the beginning of November, when the tired sportsmen, on returning from their raid upon the pheasants in a distant part of the estate, found themselves—after leaving the fog and gloom outside—greeted by a pleasant glow of firelight that filled every nook and cranny of the place. The flames flickered and danced in the great fireplaces—now, with sudden brilliancy, lighting up the features of some grim old Puritan warrior, or the lace and feathers and frippery of his enemy,

a cavalier of the same period ; then playing over the surface of a breastplate of steel, belonging to some suit of armour, to which for the moment was lent a mocking similitude of life and motion. The dark, oak-panelled walls did not themselves reflect back any glow from their sombre depths, but all the bright and burnished objects hung against them glittered and shone in the ruddy blaze.

The sound of rippling laughter mingled with the clatter of cups and plates, as tea was dispensed to such as felt disposed for that cheering yet innocent beverage. Only upon the table where Lady Villiers presided over the tea equipage was any other light than that of the fire required, and the pink-shaded lamp there did not—without the radius of its small circle—make any appreciable difference in the lighting of the hall.

A time of day dangerous to the peace of mind of the unappropriated males of a house party ; a time for drifting into flirtations,

for becoming entangled more and more deeply in flirtations already begun ; a time of soft sentiment and of idle dalliance.

Everything then works together in favour of the fair sex, and the seductive temptations of their society. The delicious feeling of rest after the hard work of the covers ; the warm, pleasant, sensuous languor that creeps over the wearied men, mind and body ; the fair faces, glimmering in the mellow light, with the subdued radiance of pearls ; the supple forms, robed in loose, flowing garments ; the bright eyes, to whose glances the firelight lends depth and significance—what are all these but so many weapons directed against the hearts and liberties of man-kind ?

A circle of men surrounded the tea-table, and to them Lady Villiers chattered like a girl let loose from school. This, indeed, exactly expresses the state of mind—excited, happy, unrestrained—of the merry hostess.

The Duchess of Dundridge, who sat bolt

upright in a chair that somewhat resembled a throne, looked disdainful disapproval at the frivolous matron from under her heavy brows. To sit in the seat of judgment came quite natural to her Grace.

Perhaps if she had been doomed to live, for the term of her natural life, with a selfish, unsocial, jealous, narrow-minded husband, such as Sir Reginald Villiers undoubtedly was, she might have understood something of the feeling that caused the attractive young wife to laugh and talk incessantly when in society ; even—in a perfectly open and innocent fashion, be it understood—to flirt atrociously with every amusing young fellow who appeared on the scene.

But the Duchess, like many of her sex, allowed no latitude for unusual conditions.

When had *she* found it necessary to seek distractions other than those afforded by the legitimate duties and pleasures of her position ?

Little, however, cared gay Lady Villiers

for the frowns of the severe Duchess. She was out on a rare holiday; and she meant to make the most of the opportunity by having what the Americans call a 'high old time.' It was scarcely likely that she would allow the ridiculous prejudices of an old woman to interfere with her enjoyment. She knew herself, and that there was no harm in any of her fun.

The Marquis of Carabas, who, it might be presumed, knew his sister better than most people, also said that there was 'no harm in her,' when the Duchess ventured to hint that Lady Villiers's conduct and demeanour laid her open to hostile comment and criticism.

'Laura wont go far wrong,' he replied reassuringly. 'She has a dull life of it in that lonely moss-grown old Grange of theirs in the Fen Country; and Sir Reginald is more than a bit of a bear! I do not wonder that she finds it an immense relief to get away from it, and from him likewise, for awhile!'

And then he went on to point out to his prospective mother-in-law that in most of the recent society scandals the women who had overstepped the line were not such high-spirited, open, lively creatures as his sister, but prim, conventional, down-looking women, who were looked upon, previous to their escapades, as the pinks of perfection and of moral rectitude.

Lady Ermyntrude, who talked the matter over with her mother, opined that though she equally disliked the ways of Lady Villiers, there was nothing left for them both but to bear with these ways in dignified silence.

So long, therefore, as Lady Villiers did not too terrifically defy and outrage public opinion she must be tolerated in her position as hostess of Bexley House.

The Duchess, however, registered a mental vow to the effect that when her eldest born reigned as queen within those lordly halls the visits of the giddy sister-in-law should

be limited to very brief and seldom recurring occasions ; that is to say, if her own influence had any weight.

And over Lady Ermyntrude her Grace knew that, so far as they had gone, her influence was supreme.

The beautiful bride-elect was, indeed, in every way a satisfactory daughter.

Never had she caused one pang to the maternal heart ; never had she forgotten, in a moment's impulse, the dignity of her exalted position, the duties and decorum proper to such extremely blue blood as coursed languidly through her aristocratic veins.

The Duchess could not avoid contrasting all these virtues with the sad shortcomings of that little hoyden Nora, as she looked from one to the other of her children. Lady Nora was, as usual, restless and active. She was flitting about the great hall ; now lost in the shadows, like a bat seeking covert, and anon emerging like some bright fluttering

butterfly, to hover around the tea-table and exchange badinage with some of the men there. Then she began to show Lady Villiers a new dance that had just been introduced, going through the various steps, to the amusement and edification of an admiring circle ; and immediately afterwards she commenced imitating, to his face, Lord Cranbery's solemn tones and demeanour when he presided on a previous night at a village meeting of the Y.M.C.A. She made a rather clever parody of his prosaic, well-intentioned speech, at which nobody laughed more than the one ridiculed.

All this frivolity considerably annoyed the Duchess ; but that lady recognised the injudiciousness of any public rebuke possible to be delivered to the flippant, merry girl.

‘ There is no repose about her,’ murmured her Grace sorrowfully. ‘ It is strange—passing strange ! How did I ever come to have such a daughter ?’

Lady Ermyntrude, on the other hand,

was all that could be desired of patrician dignity and superb repose.

She was looking extremely beautiful in her rich tea-gown, composed of some gorgeous fabric, wherein was skilfully blended various shades of gold and brown.

A faint and unusual rose-leaf tint lent animation to her exquisite face, and her hair, coiled in a simple classic style, entangled the firelight in its golden threads.

The Marquis felt proud of his chosen wife, as he hung, in a very lover-like fashion, over her chair, and whispered the soft nothings excusable to lovers on the eve of marriage.

She was telling him how charmed she was with Bexley House, to which this was her first visit.

‘It is a beautiful old place, stately, and yet luxurious,’ she remarked in a tone of pleased yet dignified approval; ‘I had no idea that the two things could be combined so charmingly. Now, at home we have the

grandeur certainly, but it is faded and tarnished ; and the luxury is entirely lacking. You have chosen a bride from a decayed and decaying house, Mandeville !

‘I have chosen a queen, for whom nothing could be too magnificent, nothing too luxurious,’ replied the Marquis gallantly. ‘Before you came the place seemed but an empty shell. You have informed it with life and meaning. Ah, Ermyntrude, it would never have suited you to marry a poor man, or one whose position was not assured. For your sake I am glad both of the title and the wealth of our house. It would not have been fitting that you, with your wondrous gifts of beauty and intellect, should have married one who, like myself a couple of years since, was a mere political adventurer, a struggler for place and power !’

What was there in these words, apparently so eminently well suited to the occasion, to cause the Marquis, ere he had completed the sentence, to falter and hesi-

tate, and a spasm of something like pain to convulse his features ?

Lady Ermyntrude, who was looking up at him with responsive affection, caught, and was bewildered by, that perplexing look.

‘What is amiss, dearest?’ she whispered anxiously. She did not raise her voice, from the fear that anyone else might notice her. Never did this carefully-educated damsel forget to be cautious. All her emotions were guarded, and kept in check. Yet at this moment she was possibly more emotional than at any previous moment of her life. Even her calm, passionless nature was affected, in some degree, by the atmosphere of the place and the hour.

The Marquis, leaning over her, was quite conscious of this unusual softness ; and it charmed and bewitched his senses. There was more of the woman about her—more of the softness and sweetness of the woman who has begun to learn dependence upon the one she loves ; and this, informing her

beauty with the charm hitherto lacking, perfected and in a rare degree intensified it.

At that moment it appeared to the Marquis that to win this peerless woman he could breast any troubled waters, dare any danger—commit any crime, almost! He crushed an exclamation between his tightly-closed lips, and put aside, with stern determination, the unpleasant thought that had persisted in intruding upon his mind.

He bent over his beloved, and, favoured by a sudden eclipse of the firelight, touched her cheek with his lips.

‘It was nothing—nothing but a twinge of rheumatism,’ he said lightly, in answer to her question; ‘you know I am but an indifferent sportsman, and to-day’s fog was sufficient to damp my ardour, lukewarm in any case.’

‘You ought to have remained at home,’ murmured Lady Ermyntrude; ‘but you men are such restless creatures. You cannot spend even half a day within doors.’

‘ I could spend, not half a day, but every day with you, Ermy!’ was the fervent reply of the Marquis; ‘ tell me again that you love me, dearest! I never tire of hearing those sweet words!’

‘ You know that I love you.’

‘ And it really is *me* you love, not merely the Marquis of Carabas?’

There was a world of anxiety in the Marquis’s tone, his eye, his eager gestures.

But ere Lady Ermyntrude could reply she was loudly claimed to decide upon a public question. Her decision as a bride-elect, and one presumably deeply in love, was considered of value by the disputants.

The case was this. A certain well-known and popular statesman had, to some extent, compromised both his own reputation and the reputation of his party by a terrible weakness into which he had been betrayed. Had it been a case of mere blundering it might have been overlooked. But it was more than this. His immediate interests

had been threatened, and he had chosen to risk the failure of a great national scheme rather than himself suffer any pecuniary loss. In such a case, a choice like this was criminal. It likewise proved an over-reaching one, for this selfish policy was eventually the ruin of him. Politically and socially, he was under a cloud. At this juncture of affairs the woman to whom he was known to be deeply attached, and whom he was about to marry, had coldly, and with deliberation, thrown him over, and, not content with this, had made the fact public property.

The point now under discussion was whether this lady's conduct was or was not justifiable by the circumstances of the case.

The Duchess, without a moment's hesitation, declared for the lady. Not only had the man to whom she had plighted her troth betrayed his cause, and so, indirectly, his country ; but he had at the same time failed to fulfil the promises he had made to the lady personally. The lofty and unim-

peachable position he had offered for her acceptance was no longer his to bestow, wherefore the bargain was certainly void.

Lady Villiers, on the other hand, stated her conviction that the creature who was capable of deserting, at such a moment, the man whom she had promised to love through good fortune and bad was undeserving of the name of woman.

“‘I know not, I care not, if guilt’s in thy heart ;
I but know that I love thee, whatsoever thou art,’”

quoted a sentimental spinster who dated from the days of Tom Moore.

‘I think she is perfectly hateful!’ cried Lady Nora, in her downright way ; ‘she has thought of no one but herself in the matter ! Why, if he *is* guilty, he but needs her the more ! I have no patience with that sort of conventional saintship, that, when a sinner would fain cling to it for help and salvation, draws its snowy robe the closer around it, for fear of smirches !’

‘Nora, why do you talk so foolishly ?’ de-

manded the Duchess severely ; ‘ it is ridiculous to hear a child like you, entirely ignorant of life and its requirements, taking upon herself the right of deciding these momentous questions. I am surprised at your audacity !’

Lady Nora laughed saucily.

‘ I thought that you would have ceased to feel any surprise at my audacity long ago, mamma,’ she answered—rather impertinently, it must be confessed.

The Duchess disdained to speak any further on the subject. She was too well bred to wrangle in company, but her fingers itched to box the ears of the little minx. Lord Cranbery, however, who was always now on the side of Lady Nora, applauded her sentiments.

‘ I cannot help fancying that she has chosen the right way of looking at the question,’ he remarked ; ‘ how, in fact, are the black sheep to be helped and rescued if we, who imagine ourselves superior to their

weaknesses, hold aloof from them? I myself know of some—pure, spotless, beautiful souls they are—who never study the danger of possible contamination while they can befriend the friendless, raise the fallen.’

He spoke with sudden enthusiasm, as the memory of Celia Tidd and her work in Mulligan’s Court rose to his mind.

The Duchess, whose keen eyes were fixed upon his tell-tale countenance, perceived at once to whom he was alluding. That horrid American woman! Her pretence of philanthropy had completely fooled him and taken him in.

Perhaps, this being so, the natural and the sympathetic was not a bad *rôle* for Nora to play. As these reflections occurred to the Duchess, she thought it well to cease her active part in the conversation, and leant back in her chair to watch events.

The Marquis of Carabas listened with a

sort of breathless eagerness to the discussion, keeping his eyes all the while upon the face of his betrothed.

‘And you, Ermyntrude? Do you agree with little Nora? Had Lord A——’s case been mine, what would your course of conduct have been?’ he asked suddenly, in a hoarse, eager voice.

Lady Ermyntrude raised her head proudly.

‘Lord A——’s case could never have been yours,’ she replied with emphasis. ‘When I answer your first question I also answer your last. I love in you, not merely the man, but the Marquis. The Marquis of Carabas can do nothing that is mean or shameful!’

A long, shuddering sigh, that seemed to come from a heart over-burdened with some secret weight of care or grief, sounded from the shadows behind her.

‘I thought so — I — I thought such would be your answer,’ said the Marquis,

with a strange, despairing intonation of voice.

Lady Ermyntrude's fair, firm white hand lay on the arm of her chair. Suddenly, to her astonishment, it was clasped in a half-savage manner and held tight by her lover.

'I shall hold you against the world, and nothing shall make me give you up—nothing!'

Lady Ermyntrude did not catch the import of the muttered words, but his excitement impressed her, nevertheless.

'Why, Mandeville, whatever has come over you?' she said quickly. 'One would think it a personal question we were discussing.'

The Marquis gave an unmirthful laugh.

'I was recalling some of our later Marquises, who haven't quite fulfilled the exalted ideal with which you appear to have endowed them,' he remarked, with some bitterness; 'but then, of course, you will not hold

me answerable for these family shortcomings. But, Ermyntrude, you are all wrong. Listen for just a moment. Do not, for pity's sake, expect any superhuman goodness from me. I am a man, with my full share of a man's weaknesses and sins. If you will persist in idealizing me, and then find out some day that I fall far short of your ideal, you will hate me for it. And yet it will not be my fault. I am honest enough to tell you beforehand that I am no hero—no *preux chevalier*.'

There was both pain and impatience underlying the words, but Lady Ermyntrude's intuitions were not of the keenest.

'I know you better than you know yourself,' she replied quietly; 'and once again I tell you that I love, not merely the man, but the Marquis!'

This time the Marquis did not try to alter her conviction. He muttered something that sounded like 'God help us both, then!' and, rising from his leaning position,

he left his guests to amuse themselves in what manner they chose until the gong sounded the command, and they departed their various ways to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LADY NORA SURPRISES HER FATHER.

THE Bexley House party had separated, and the delight of the Duke of Dundridge at sight of his favourite daughter again was pleasant to witness. It was tempered by a sense of coming restraint under the severe rule of his Duchess, but the pleasure outweighed the pain. Gone, doubtless, was the unwonted freedom of his bucolic bachelor life amongst his flocks and herds, his liberty of action and relief from all conventionalities. No longer did he dare to lounge about in a coat smelling strongly of the stables, and a pair of muddy hob-nailed shoes, and to have his meals at all sorts of

hours in order to suit the exigencies of his outdoor pursuits. But then, on the other hand, here by his side was his darling little Nora, brimful of eager interest in every living creature upon the estate ; Nora, who knew the points of every horse in his stable, and peculiarities of temper of every beast in his fields, as well as he himself did, and who loved him better than all the rest of the world put together. Her sympathy was dearer to him even than his freedom, he confessed to himself, as he watched her eyes sparkle and glisten during their progress around the old place, and heard her merry laugh ring once more. It had been very comfortable without them all ; but there was no doubt that it had been a little dull, for he missed Nora. There was no one like Nora in the whole wide world, he decided, with a glow of contentment about the region of the heart.

And Lady Nora—little witch that she was!—made herself more than commonly

attractive to her father, in order to gain her object. Never had she been so eager to join in his pursuits, never so ready to accept his dictum upon the merits or demerits of cattle as altogether infallible. Usually she was rather given to having an opinion of her own upon various points, and to fighting it out to the bitter end with perfect good-humour, but considerable obstinacy. These little disagreements were enjoyed by both the parties concerned, and generally ended with a series of hugs and a shower of kisses.

But on this occasion Lady Nora allowed the Duke to lay down the law entirely uncontradicted. Even when he pointed out to her that she had been mistaken in her estimate of a certain Jersey cow, her own particular property, she gave way and allowed him to abuse her pet, even against the pleading of its soft brown eyes, and much to his astonishment.

What had come to his little girl to bring about this surprising change? he wondered.

Her own blue eyes had a pleading, pathetic look in them, more unusual than the moist tenderness of those of Daisy, the Jersey cow. She was softer altogether, more winning, more womanly ; less of a sprite and more of a human being, with a capacity for the ordinary joys and sorrows of her race.

The Duke was not a very observant man in a general way ; but love lends insight, and it did occur to him to wonder whether little Nora had lost her heart to any of the fellows she had met at Bexley House.

Like all the rest of his relatives, the Duke made no account whatever of Lord Cranbery. He was but as a sort of tame cat to the Duke, who despised a reflective and non-sporting man as a creature of another order of being than his own, and who sometimes wished that his little girl had been more congenially disposed of.

‘Daddy,’ said Lady Nora softly, as they were tramping over a field of turnips on their homeward way after a long day spent

together in a most delightfully bucolic fashion, 'is marriage always a failure?'

The Duke started as though he had been shot, and then stood still and looked at Lady Nora, his red face growing redder, and his round eyes rounder, as he gazed.

'Good heavens, Nora, what a question!' he exclaimed in a surprised voice. 'I never thought you bothered your little head over those ridiculous social problems. They ought not to let you read such things—they ought not indeed!'

'One cannot get through life without thinking about something, surely; although, to hear people talk, it seems quite easy,' replied Lady Nora with some petulance. Then, changing her tone: 'Oh, daddy dear, don't you think it is the system, and not the thinking, that's to blame? Why are we to live the lives we do if they won't bear thinking about?'

'I don't quite understand you, child,' said the Duke uneasily.

‘ I’m only a girl, of course, and girls ought to know nothing—at least, that’s mamma’s creed. But you have yourself said that my head is screwed on the right way—now, haven’t you, daddy ?’

The Duke laughed and nodded.

‘ Well, then, the fact is this—one gets to know things whether one wants to or not. Wouldn’t it be better to be prepared for all the disagreeable facts of life, instead of having to find them out for one’s self with a rush ? One ought to be let down easily somehow ; for you see, daddy, it comes hard on a woman who has been hedged in with conventionalities and pretty falsehoods and——’

Lady Nora stopped suddenly with an impatient sigh, as though she could, as she would, have said much more, but deemed it advisable to refrain.

The Duke could not have been more astonished had his favourite horse found

speech, like the ass of Balaam, and questioned his right to ride or master it.

For his little Nora, of all people in the world, to dive below the surface of things in this way, and bring to his notice problems fit only for philosophers like Herbert Spencer, or advanced thinkers of the Ibsen school!

‘What has got into your head, Nora? I can’t have you muddling your brains with matters that don’t concern you.’

Lady Nora slipped her hand within his arm, and laid her cheek against his coat-sleeve.

‘But suppose they do concern me?’ she said in a low, soft voice. ‘Suppose I am awakening to the fact that I have a right to my own individual existence, with its possibilities for joy and sorrow, affection and — and love ——’ Here, as she rubbed her round cheek against his arm, she gave a quick upward glance to mark the effect of her words. ‘What then? Must I have no voice in the

ordering of the fashion in which that same existence is to be gone through? Must I be prepared to accept what is given me or no, and be grateful for every counterfeit that takes the place of a reality, every sham that serves to hide a want? Must I be content to love to order, and to love where I am not loved? Such, I am told, is the proper course of action for women—such I see for myself is frequently the fashion in our class. Daddy, I am not content. I do not believe it is the right way. It is a doctrine of the devil, and leads to more sin than anything else could do. If I accept it, I shall be more wicked than the others who do so, because my eyes are opened to its folly. You wouldn't like your little Nora to be unhappy, and to be wicked perhaps—because she *was* unhappy; would you now, dear, dear daddy?"

By word, look, and action Lady Nora pleaded her cause well. From gentle reasoning she rose to fiery indignation, and, now

subsiding, ended all by the tenderest of coaxing.

How pretty she looked as she leant thus against her father, her arch, bewitching face upturned to his bluff one! How could he help but stoop and kiss the rosy lips, even though he knew that every caress was a committal for him to something indefinite—and therefore probably troublesome!

‘You are not happy, Nora,’ he said, in rather a husky voice; ‘I never suspected that anything was wrong.’

They walked on a few paces, and then he spoke again.

‘What is the matter, dear? You ought to tell me what it is that troubles you.’

As this question was put, the girl looked before her, and then she laughed right merrily.

‘There it is,’ she cried with gay humour, a child again in a moment, clapping her hands and pointing to a figure advancing towards them. ‘That is what troubles me,

daddy! A nice sort of man to have for one's life companion, isn't he? Oh, what a congenial couple we shall prove!' The Duke followed the direction in which she pointed, and could not resist the infection of her merriment, although in his case it was mingled with impatience and vexation.

Certainly Lord Cranbery—for it was no other than that young nobleman, taking a constitutional—cut a ridiculous figure as considered in the light of a husband for a lively, animated girl like Lady Nora. He wore a pair of goloshes over his neat little Parisian boots; a voluminous comforter encircled his thin throat; his ordinary spectacles had been replaced by a pair of smoke-coloured ones; and he carried his umbrella aloft in order to shade his face from the rays of the sun.

The Duke glanced from his trim little Nora, in her well-fitting dress of gray homespun and her stout country-made boots, to

this incongruous person, transplanted from the boulevard or the pavement.

The contrast was too marked to be an altogether pleasant one.

‘Why, what the mischief is the matter with the fellow?’ muttered his Grace, in a tone of irritation. ‘Has he got the influenza, that he requires to take such care of his health?’

Lady Nora seized the auspicious moment.

‘Daddy,’ she said in a tone of entreaty, ‘you see how utterly unsuited we are to each other. You won’t insist upon marrying us, will you?’

‘But what about *him*, Nora? Confound the fellow for masquerading in such a guise!’—the latter *sotto voce*. ‘I dare say he’s got feelings of his own, though he does look such a ninny—hem!—that is, I cannot allow you to behave badly to anyone, Nora, much less to a well-principled young man like Cranbery! Bless my soul, you can’t

refuse to marry a man because he wears goloshes and a comforter, can you ?

By this time they had reached Lord Cranbery, and Nora made her next appeal to him.

‘I’ve broken the ice with daddy, Cran,’ she cried ; ‘now it’s your turn to speak out ! You are not dying to marry me, are you, cousin ?’

At this sudden question Lord Cranbery crimsoned under his umbrella.

‘We think ; that is, Nora—of course, I know it sounds strange—but, in fact, Nora ought to have a husband with tastes more congenial to her own, you know !’

Lady Nora made a queer little *moue*.

‘And then there is Cran,’ she added. ‘I’m too silly and too frivolous for his great schemes of life, daddy. He wants someone more advanced—more, what shall I say ?—someone with more serviceable ideas—to satisfy his ideal of a wife. Perhaps he might find it on the other

side of the Atlantic,' she went on in the most wickedly ingenuous fashion, causing poor Cran to writhe about in discomfiture. 'I have been told that American ladies are ahead of us in these matters. At any rate, everybody says I am just a little goose — everybody except *you*, daddy.'

The Duke laughed as she again cuddled close up to him, and gave him a beseeching glance.

'More of the fox than the goose about you at this moment, Nora,' he remarked, and then his face suddenly lengthened. 'And how about your mother, child? Who is to break the matter to the Duchess?'

Here Lord Cranbery astonished Lady Nora by his unexpected readiness to reply to this question.

'I will,' he said, with a firmness quite remarkable, considering his great natural dread of her Grace. 'You have been too good to me already, Nora; and it is only

fair that I should do something now. She can but order me out of the house.'

'And you will be only too glad to obey,' laughed Lady Nora; 'but are you sure you can summon courage? You know I promised to see you through with this affair!'

But Lord Cranbery's chivalry was aroused, and he carried out his intention.

The fury of her Grace knew no bounds when he quietly announced that night in the drawing-room that, Lady Nora and he having mutually agreed to renounce their engagement, he begged the permission of the Duchess to make such resolution known to the world.

Her Grace, more imposing than ever in black velvet and emeralds, rose from the lounging chair in which she never lounged, and faced him in majestic displeasure.

'Am I to understand, Lord Cranbery, that you decline to ally yourself with my family? That you — after allowing your cousin to consider herself engaged to you

during the best part of her lifetime, and especially during the past season, when she might probably have contracted a more brilliant marriage—now contemplate, in the calmest manner, throwing her over?’

‘Nora does not love me,’ murmured Lord Cranbery gently.

The Duchess waved her fan of crimson feathers as though it were a sceptre.

‘Do not be trivial,’ she said, with exceeding dignity. ‘Such objections are not usually brought forward for the annulling of suitable and reasonable engagements. Nora is but a child. She does not know her own mind.’

‘But indeed I do, mamma!’ cried Lady Nora, rushing into the arena at the first battle-cry. ‘I know that nothing would ever make me care for Cran as a woman should care for the man she marries.’

‘Nora, you are insufferable!’ exclaimed the angry Duchess. ‘How often have I begged of you not to interrupt when I am

stating my opinions? You are but a child, raw, ignorant, unformed.'

'At least I am not sufficiently ignorant to marry a man who is in love with another woman.'

The Duchess looked from one to the other in superb disdain, and then a significant look dawned in her flashing eyes.

'So this is what you were plotting together at Bexley House, when I fondly hoped you were growing attached to each other's society. I might have known you meant to deceive me—both of you !'

She paused for a moment, and strove to conquer her rising indignation, and recover the dignity which was in a fair way of becoming lost in the contest.

'Such, alas ! is the fate of mothers, even the best intentioned and least selfish. Lord Cranberry, I am disappointed in you—distinctly disappointed. You have taken advantage of my absence to work upon Nora's feelings, and to render her pliable in your

hands. Of course, no properly brought-up girl would choose to marry a man who told her with brutal frankness that he did not love her; but——’

‘Indeed you are mistaken!’ exclaimed poor Lord Cranbery, apparently ready to sink into the ground in his humiliation. ‘I couldn’t do such a thing—indeed I could not!’

At this moment the Duke entered the room, and Lady Nora ran up to him.

‘It is time you came to take my part,’ she said in a low voice. ‘Cran and I will be made to eat humble-pie, and to marry each other, after all, if you don’t be quick.’

‘What is the matter, Volumnia?’ asked the Duke in a quiet, prosaic tone. ‘You are making poor Cran look uncommonly queer, I can tell you. Has the boy been getting into some scrape, and coming to you for motherly advice?’

At first it appeared as though the Duchess was almost too angry to explain. But after

a few moments she began to feel the necessity for some kind of moral support. Besides, nominally at least, her husband was head of the family, and would need to be consulted, were it but for the sake of appearances.

She detailed the circumstances, therefore, in a few brief and cutting sentences, which made poor Cran writhe upon his chair, and caused a quick flush of resentment to arise in the cheeks of Lady Nora.

When she concluded, the Duke avoided her glance, and, looking out of the window, observed that it was a very awkward situation altogether, a lame conclusion of which her Grace did not vouchsafe to take notice.

‘It would be ridiculous of them to marry if they feel like that,’ he went on, after rubbing up his short gray hair, in order to stimulate his brain to activity, and finding the action entirely unproductive of the required result. ‘I—really, you know, Volumnia—it is an awkward situation.’

‘Am I to understand that you are pre-

pared to aid and abet these extremely foolish and wrong-headed young persons in their repudiation of all their lawful ties and relationships ?

‘ Oh, come now, Volumnia, you talk as though they were already married !’

‘ And has not the world regarded them in that light for the past year ? Has not your daughter gone into society under the disadvantage of a settled engagement ? Who do you think will look at a girl who has been thrown over by a—a Cranberry ?’

‘ Mamma, you have no right to talk of me as though I were merely a piece of goods—a bale of silk or something—put up to be sold to the highest bidder !’ burst in Lady Nora with indignation. ‘ What does it matter whether I ever marry or no ? Why, daddy, the poorest tradesman we deal with can keep his daughter at home if he chooses ; but you—I declare it is too bad ! Will you let them talk of me as though you wanted to be rid of me, dear ?’

Thus addressed, the Duke rose to the occasion.

‘You shall not bully the girl any longer,’ he declared, in a voice that bore down opposition. ‘If she does not care about Cran, and Cran doesn’t care about her, they shall not be forced into an uncongenial marriage. We see enough of that sort of thing every day. It ends in the Divorce Court as often as not! The little girl is right, by Jupiter! It’s a hard case if a Duke can’t afford to keep his child at home as well as a butcher or baker. Cranbery, you shan’t have Nora now at any price. She’s far too good for you. Go away, and marry your—your advanced, philanthropic woman—or—or anybody you like, so long as you leave me my dear little Nora at home.’

CHAPTER XXXIX.

‘VIVE MEMOR LETHI.’

THE wedding of the Marquis of Carabas and Lady Ermyntrude Challoner took place early in January. They came up to town for the purpose, for the Duchess could not endure the idea of a country church and a rustic ceremony. At least, this is what she said. Some of her particular friends declared that she did not care to subject the faded and shabby grandeur of the Castle to the scrutiny of the necessary guests.

At any rate, town was decided upon, although at that season of the year it was—socially speaking—a desert. Perhaps this also suited the plans of her Grace, which had perforce to savour of economy.

They were married at St. Peter's, Eaton Square ; and it was a very pretty spectacle, as all the fashionable journals allowed. No more beautiful bride than Lady Ermyntrude, in her white satin and Brussels lace, with its trimming of ostrich feathers, was it possible to conceive.

The Duchess felt justly proud of her daughter. And even little Nora did not look badly in her coquettish little three-cornered hat of white and silver, which suited her style much more thoroughly than did similar ones the differing charms of the other three bridesmaids.

‘But Nora has been a distinct disappointment to me,’ her Grace could not refrain from remarking to one of her intimates, who had ventured to admire the girl. ‘She is her father's daughter far more than mine.’

‘Well, well,’ returned her friend laughingly, ‘it is but fair he should own one of them. And if it is her future you are thinking of—why, there's plenty of time for that!

It would have been a thousand pities to have tied her to a miserable hypochondriac like Cranbery.’

‘Cranbery was such a safe man—such an eminently safe man.’

‘*Ne fronti crede,*’ said the lady, with a shrug of her shoulders. She was a bit of a blue-stocking, and liked nothing better than to drag in a phrase of Latin or Greek at odd times. This was a habit that annoyed the Duchess exceedingly. In the first place, she herself did not understand the dead languages, and in the second she disapproved of women who did.

She therefore turned her regal back upon her friend, and began at once to discuss a recent society scandal with another person.

Meanwhile the happy pair were speeding away Southwards, to sunnier skies and a warmer atmosphere.

It was murmured amongst those assembled that the Marquis was looking out of health, and even careworn, on the eventful occasion.

He had, in fact, been in a highly strung, tense condition for some months past. He would start if one came upon him suddenly, and become at times strangely agitated without cause. There was an attitude of something akin to expectancy about him—an attitude that would have puzzled a keen observer.

Fortunately for him, there were no really keen observers in the group of persons with whom he was then associated. The sharpest eyes amongst them belonged to Lady Nora, and once or twice she had stated her firm conviction that Carabas had ‘something on his mind’—a suggestion which was met at once with contemptuous incredulity. And Lady Nora being herself at this period under a cloud, she did not insist, as once she might have done, upon being believed.

It is certain that when the carriage-door was shut upon the newly wedded pair the Marquis heaved a sigh of intense relief. The cup was not to be snatched from his lips

at the last moment. For that, at least, he had surely cause for thankfulness !

But if he fondly imagined that he had therefore escaped from any further trouble or unhappiness, it was not long before he had reason to change his opinion.

Even his marriage with the woman he adored did not secure him from a subtle and recurrent form of misery.

Although the ‘little rift within the lute’ was distinctly perceptible to the acute sensibility of the Marquis, it did not arise from any of the ordinary causes incident to married life. It was not that his love for Ermyntrude began in the least to wane. He was—if possible—more passionately enamoured of her than before marriage. That cold, proud, faultless beauty of hers was of a kind to appeal most especially to one of his temperament. With him the refined and the unusual had ever more sway than the sensuous. He would not have had her altered for worlds. That icy

reserve, that calm dignity, became her infinitely too well for him to desire any change.

He had—for that matter—love enough for both.

Nevertheless, he knew that she was beginning to love him. It was a continual and delightful surprise when the exquisite marble creature awakened to life for his especial benefit. Surely it was as much the man as the Marquis now who was able to touch her heart, and move it from its calm serenity to a human interest and a human love.

The Marquis watched, with a solicitude that had a touch of pathos about it, the slow growth of this delicate and tender plant of wifely affection. He knew that in its early stages one breath of east wind would cause it to shrivel up and die outright. And it meant so much to him ! He had paid so dearly for the chance of its existence.

Throughout the months of their wander-

ings abroad he was far more a lover than a husband, surrounding Ermyntrude with every little lover-like attention, hanging on her looks and words as few men, save those who fear to lose what they ardently covet, would care to do. Indeed, the Marchioness told him this, once or twice, with a smile, although of course she could not fail to be pleased by such devotion.

After awhile, however, this continued attitude of his raised within her some slight degree of wonder. Was there not something abnormal about such behaviour? Her experience—limited as it was by the narrow and exclusive society wherein she had moved—taught her to think so. Even in her circle of acquaintances she had heard young wives complain of neglect during the month of honey—at any rate, if that month was prolonged for an indefinite period, as was her own. Honey is very nice at first, but it is rather apt to cloy on the palate, and this at a very early date indeed.

But Carabas never showed the least distaste for it—the slightest wish for a change of diet.

He was, if possible, more perfect as a husband than as a lover. In his anxiety to rivet her affection there was something that appeared almost like fear, though fortunately for her peace of mind the Marchioness was not yet alive to this fact. But this it was that prevented the Marquis from gleaning all the possible good from his new and ardently desired happiness.

Over every human bliss, however exquisite, there is thrown a shadow—some persistent dread, some haunting memory, some vague presentiment. Else were men as gods, forgetful of a past, defiant of a hereafter.

With Carabas there was ever present the dread that a day might dawn when those beloved eyes, wherein the light of love was beginning to awaken, would turn from his with haughty contempt and displeasure.

And rather than face that, he would suffer death in a thousand shameful ways.

Had he not been a man of a highly organized nature, there would have been more chance for him to overcome some of these morbid fears. One of coarser fibre might have laughed them to scorn. The very uncertainty of its duration would have added perchance a zest to the enjoyment of the moment. He might have said, 'Let me, in the face of a sad future, drink to the dregs this cup of bliss. Let me seize my happiness now, without a misgiving. The more I snatch from the present, the less have I to lose hereafter !'

But the educated and perfected conscience of generations is an insurmountable barrier to happiness of that kind ; consequently the Marquis had, along with the most blissful, the most melancholy moments of his existence.

How happy he might have been during that halcyon time ! It was so delightful to

loiter along the Riviera in a lazy, enjoyable fashion, going over the old ground he knew so well under such altered conditions. They shunned as far as practicable the beaten track, and the conventional crowd that flocks to Rome and Florence during the early months of the year ; they observed no fixed plan, followed no settled route ; they drifted hither and thither as they were wafted by the winds of fancy, now lingering in quaint, old-world Italian towns, then in mountain solitudes, under groves of chestnut, and amongst the gray olives, where peeps of the blue sea came ever and anon in sight to finish the perfection of the scene.

The time they had was all too short. They were obliged to give up their original project of visiting Egypt, or at least to defer it until a more convenient season.

Life—with its ugly prosaic facts and realities—called them homewards, in tones peremptory and impossible to be withstood. Parliament was to meet early that year ;

and, as it was, the Marquis would not be back in time for the opening.

Carnival in Florence—whither they had by this time arrived—seemed flat, stale, and vulgar, a modern mockery of an old-world festival, with its flower-throwing *Corso* of decayed and miserable bouquets, its showers of chalk sugar-plums, its *Ballo in Maschera* at the celebrated Pergola Theatre.

The merriment had, to the Marquis's fancy, a forced ring about it; and the stiff English propriety of Ermyntrude's mind totally unfitted her for any appreciation of the charm of the scene—if charm there were.

As a rule, persons of our nationality appear to enjoy excessively the license and rollicking fun of the Carnival, the vulgar revelry of the crowd, the licensed rudeness of the *scherzatori*. Not only do they do as Rome does, but they go a great deal further, and do as Rome would hesitate to do. This is probably a protest against the lingering puritanism of

their home-training. A shy man—the ice once broken—will ever say and do more outrageous things than a bolder one ; and in precisely the same way will one of puritanic upbringing proceed to greater license when he allows himself to be cut adrift from his scruples.

But the puritanism of the Marchioness was an ingrained principle, not merely a conventional one ; wherefore it was that there seemed to her much that was shameful and degrading in the follies of the Carnival.

At the Pergola Theatre more semblance of order was preserved. The Marchioness found some pleasure in surveying the brilliant spectacle presented there. The garlands of flowers with which the boxes were wreathed, the living flowers of women that filled them, the wonderful toilettes, the sparkle of gems, the glances of bright eyes, and, below, the rapidly changing groups of dancers in strange costumes and masks—all combined to pro-

duce in her mind a feeling of gay excitement unusual to her. Suddenly she touched the arm of the Marquis.

‘Do you see, Mandeville? In the box exactly opposite is Lady Hermia Gunnerton. You remember her? There—she is the one with the emeralds. I declare, she is more beautiful than ever!’

This name brought with it a somewhat unpleasant reminiscence to the Marquis. It was, in fact, the name of the lady about whom the discussion had taken place at Bexley House—the lady who had, at a critical period of his career, thrown over a certain statesman, and who had since married an American millionaire.

The Marquis hated the woman, although he had never spoken to her. She had been the unconscious cause of a determination to which he had, as he considered, been forced; and since that determination was contrary to his sense of right and justice he could not be expected to forgive the compelling

cause. Now he followed with reluctance the direction of Ermyntrude's gaze.

Lady Hermia Gunnerton shone like a star amongst all that lovely throng. Her wonderful colouring — Titianesque in its absolute audacity of tint—rendered her pre-eminent ; but she had withal a look of ineffable weariness, as though life had failed to satisfy some inward requirement of her nature. By her side sat a little, commonplace, bald-headed man, who presented in the last respect as complete a contrast to her as was possible, since his simple countenance beamed with a happiness serene and all-sufficing. This, without doubt, was Horatio Washington Gunnerton, the world-envied millionaire.

As the Marquis glanced at the pair, another picture rose before his mental vision. It was that of a lonely man, eating his heart out in exile and solitude, hopeless and despairing, with both love and ambition blotted out of his life at the same moment.

‘Poor A——!’ he murmured under his breath; ‘I wonder does she ever think of him now?’

The Marchioness looked severely grave.

‘Indeed I hope not! It would be worse than foolish. It would be an injustice to her husband, who has given her so much.’

‘Is that all women think of?’ asked the Marquis, with a sudden flame of anger—‘what the men they pretend to love have to give them? Surely he gave her something when he gave her the entire devotion of his heart? And on that point no one ever doubted his sincerity.’

Ermyntrude kept her calm eyes fixed on his troubled face.

‘He had deceived her on one point—then why not on another? For my part, I could never again believe in a man who had been guilty of a doubtful action.’

Her tone was cold and hard as ice, and under its influence the Marquis shivered as

from a sudden chill. Then he shrugged his shoulders and laughed bitterly.

‘You ought to have married an angel, Ermy,’ he said, ‘not any poor mortal who sins and suffers.’

As he turned away, and looked at the gay scene around, it struck him suddenly as horrible and grotesque—a sort of modern version of the Dance of Death. It was as a dream flitting across the brain at the moment of awakening. There seemed nothing incongruous or abnormal about it when a masked and dominoed figure entered the box, holding in its hands a goblet filled to the brim with some sparkling beverage. It was all a part of the dismal phantasmagoria that this intruder should wear a mask painted with hideous realism after the fashion of a skull, and should speak in hollow and sepulchral tones.

‘Drink,’ it commanded, with a strong nasal accent, ‘drink to-day—drink while ye may, drink ere ye pass away! *Vive memor*

Lethi! Drink, nevertheless, that ye may laugh at me!

The face of the Marchioness grew white to the lips. She clung to her husband in nervous dread.

‘What—what is it? How ghastly!’ she stammered. Her voice aroused the Marquis from his trance just as he was stretching out his hand mechanically to take the goblet. He drew it across his eyes instead, to dispel the illusion.

Then, with no gentle grasp, he took the arm of the figure, and led it outside.

‘This is intolerable!’ he exclaimed angrily. ‘By what right do you presume to enter here, and to alarm a lady in such a manner?’

‘It is but the usage of Carnival, signore. We mean no harm.’

‘Then be off elsewhere with your damned foolery!’

‘Drink first, then,’ persisted the grim jester. The Marquis, to humour and be rid of him, just touched the goblet with his

lips. As he did so, the strange feeling of dream or fantasy again seized upon him. Was it 'Death's dark wine' that he quaffed in that fateful moment?

'Let us go at once, Ermy,' he said, as he returned to his wife; 'the fun is waxing fast and furious: too much so to be pleasant. I am sure you must be tired of it all by this time.'

The Marchioness was not sorry to leave. She was unimaginative to a degree, and yet the incident that had just occurred had affected her unpleasantly. *Vive memor Lethi*. Why should one remember death just when life was at its best?

By the middle of March they were back in foggy, smoky London, and the Marchioness was fulfilling her girlhood's dream: entertaining important personages; entering with a sort of cold eagerness into all her husband's political schemes; fancying herself a power in society and in the world of brains, and finding happiness in such a supposition.

CHAPTER XL.

CELIA CHANGES HER SKIES, BUT NOT HER MIND.

MISS TIDD had fallen in at once with her brother's proposition that, in place of touring about England, as they had previously intended, they should visit Japan.

Celia was in just the restless, dissatisfied state of mind to grasp eagerly at any project promising a complete change from her present surroundings. There was nothing now to detain her in town. Her various *protégés* were provided for.

One, indeed—the poor girl in Mulligan's Court—had gone to the grave unmourned, with all her sins and her wealth of love ; and the man for whose sake she was ready

to perjure herself was serving out the ridiculously short sentence passed upon him. At the end of his time he would probably emerge more callous and brutalized than ever.

Little Tommy was down amongst the hop-gardens of Kent, in a small cottage-home for children, and had already adapted himself with alacrity to his surroundings and forgotten his past. Forgotten also, apparently, the woman who had rescued him from the jaws of Death ; for when Celia, who had placed him there, went to visit him and took him up in her arms, he immediately began to howl for his new mother, and could only be tempted to remain where he was by the present of a wooden horse, radiant with red spots, and bristly with an upstanding mane. Celia kissed his reluctant cheek, and with a sigh set him down. It was a little thing, but it hurt her.

‘I shall be delighted to go, Marc,’ she answered instantly, when, with some hesitation, he broached the subject. ‘I am tired

of it all, I think—parties, theatres, society, philanthropy—everything. I can't think of anything that will suit me better than to go to Japan. I've just been reading about it in one of the magazines, and it certainly appears as yet to be fresh and unspoilt by tourists. I'm sick to death of the beaten tracks. Here everyone talks, walks, dresses, and even thinks, alike ; and nobody seems really happy. What do we all want, I wonder ? Nobody knows. Perhaps a simpler and more unsophisticated life may teach one the grand secret. By all means let us go there. They at least are said to be entirely and easily contented, leading their natural, unspeculative, objective lives. Why can't we learn to do the same ?

So it came to pass that, far removed from the bustle of London, the endless toil of its workers, and the equally endless toil of its pleasure-seekers, Celia Tidd was endeavouring to realize her dream of a simple and natural life.

Surely, if anywhere the secret of a joyous existence lingers, it must be amongst the child-souled, simple-minded Japanese. They, at least, are at one with the world wherein they live, and are interested in a natural fashion in all around them. Mother Nature, as they know her, is bright, fresh, exhilarating, and beautiful, and they are content to worship her without analyzing her charm.

But alas for the sophisticated denizens of our ultra-civilized, nerve-straining cities, whose visions of simple happiness are apt to prove but a flying ideal! Happiness comes to those who pursue it not, but those who chase it never seem to win that race. City-bred people unfortunately carry with them tastes and habits incompatible with simple enjoyment. They have lost the power of living objectively, and their pleasures, since all others have ceased to charm, must needs be of the most subtle and studied kind.

Celia Tidd was the finished product of civilization. The people around her were

but grown-up children. Their happy outdoor life was incomprehensible to her. Marc Aurelius, her brother, yet retained sufficient of the elements of primeval savagery to render him perfectly at ease and happy, and he thoroughly enjoyed the change from town ; but there is no manner of doubt that Celia was beginning to feel bored and uncomfortable.

After the novelty had worn off, things grew tiresome, and the absence of some of the luxuries to which she was accustomed depressed and annoyed her. She complained that the paper houses were cold ; that the people seemed to live without sleep themselves, and to expect others to do the same, since they kept up noise and singing, and what they chose to call music, all night long ; and that the innumerable fleas and mosquitoes finished the business, and ruined her complexion likewise. The huge travelling-trunks, without which the American girl finds it impossible to exist, were a

never-ending source of worry and anxiety ; and, last of all, the food of the country was not of a kind calculated to tempt the appetite of the fastidious.

She looked herself like some exquisite but incongruous exotic as she sat, or rather lounged, upon a long cane chair in the veranda of the pretty little house wherein they had been living for the past two months. Daintily attired as ever, she did not appear to have suffered in looks from the fatigues and worries she had undergone.

But there was a listless despondency in her gaze entirely foreign to it as her eyes wandered over the view without heeding its beauties, though in truth it was well worth a more appreciative vision.

A beautiful garden, laid out in terraces, and brilliant with red azaleas, showy peonies, and glimmering irises, sloped down to the bank of a rushing mountain-torrent. Tiny bridges spanned the boisterous stream, and

away on the other side stretched a richly-wooded country, with here and there a little village lying at the foot of a hill. Rosy flashes of azalea shot across the sombre blackness of the woods of pine and cryptomeria.

Miss Tidd was awaiting, with some impatience, the return of her brother. He had gone a considerable distance to the house of an American resident in that district, to whom he had letters of introduction, and at the same time he intended to meet the letters and books which were following them up the country.

Meanwhile Celia, left alone, reviewed the situation. It was very weak in her, no doubt, but the truth is that she missed Lord Cranbery and his devotion more and more every day. Had anyone accused her of being in love with that infatuated young nobleman she would have stoutly denied it; but he had become necessary to her, all the same. It is a strange development of

modern life that a woman can love what she laughs at.

She has in a manner adapted herself to her male contemporary, and is ready to accept him with all his limitations. She no longer asks for a faultless knight, a hero to worship and to treat with reverence.

Celia Tidd was in all things essentially modern. She was quite capable of herself ridiculing all Lord Cranbery's little foibles and eccentricities ; but she was equally capable of resenting it bitterly did anyone choose to follow her lead.

The mischief-making of Zachary Luxmore had raised a barrier between them, even had fate, in the person of Lady Nora, not done so previously. Her cheeks burned when she thought of the sordid figure she must cut in the estimation of the man she liked. But the annoying incident had one effect little recked of by the artist. It made Cranbery assume a more important position in Celia's estimation, and she herself

a humbler one. She also thought of him more frequently than she might otherwise have done.

‘I hope you haven’t waited luncheon,’ said Marc Aurelius, coming on to the veranda with his hands full of letters and papers. ‘I stayed with the Whitnams longer than I intended; in fact, they insisted upon my having something to eat before I left.’

Celia shrugged her shoulders.

‘I think you were right,’ she replied carelessly. ‘You didn’t lose much by being out, any way; I hope you had something more palatable than salted snails and rice, that’s all!’

The American did not answer immediately. In his usual deliberate fashion he selected a cigarette from his case, and sat down and smoked awhile before looking up at his sister. Celia had in the meantime risen, and stood leaning against one of the poles of the veranda.

‘Pity you didn’t know your own mind before, my dear,’ he remarked in the quietest of voices ; ‘might have saved us a troublesome journey.’

Celia started, and the spray of pink azalea she was holding fell from her fingers.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Why, this : if you are going to keep on regretting your young sprig of nobility all the while, after rushing me across the world in order to evade him, it isn’t lively work for you—or for me either, for that matter.’

Miss Tidd laughed, but the laugh had a shade of self-consciousness in it.

‘Don’t be a silly, Marc ! I haven’t lost my appetite, if that is what you choose to insinuate. It is only that there isn’t anything in this heathen land fit for a civilized person to eat.’

‘Well, no—I suppose that’s correct ! The food question is serious. Not that it matters to me, personally. I can eat and digest anything—from a rhinoceros steak to

a slice of blubber. But still, you know, Celia, that isn't all that is the matter with you. It isn't only the discomforts you have to endure that serve to make you restless and unhappy, my child. You had better go back and fight it out with Lady Nora Challoner. They say she doesn't care two straws for her cousin, so I fancy your chance is a good one.'

A faint rose flush crept over Celia's exquisite face as her brother's eyes were fixed upon it.

'Read your letters, Marc, and don't talk nonsense,' she exclaimed with considerable sharpness of tone; 'above all, don't trouble to analyze my feelings. It isn't worth while, I assure you!'

Thus enjoined, Marc Aurelius devoted his attention to the packet of letters he had received, while Celia listlessly turned over the pages of a Review.

All at once Mr. Tidd gave a sudden and vigorous exclamation.

‘ I declare it’s too bad ! ’ he cried ; ‘ and the worst of it is that it’s partly my own fault. I ought to have told the truth about the young fellow, and not left it to the honour of a—a confounded British aristocrat ! Hang it all ! ’

‘ What is wrong, Marc ? ’

‘ Everything ! That precious Marquis of Carabas, who is, after all, no more Marquis of Carabas than I am, is behaving like a cad. I gave him rope enough, and he is proceeding to hang himself as speedily as possible. But, then, I had no right to give him the rope. I waited for developments, but I certainly didn’t expect this one. It appears that the youngster who has the best right to the title is a bit of a Socialist. At any rate, he was mixed up in some way with the rioters who attacked the Dundridge house in Park Lane ; but so far as I can see there is no evidence to prove that he was not on the side of law and order. Natheless, the Crown decided to prosecute,

and the poor lad is cooling his ardour in prison.'

'But the Marquis cannot know who he really is?'

'I reckon he couldn't fail to do so when he read the papers contained in that sealed packet I gave him. Besides, the newspapers have taken up the case, and are ringing with the scandal. But what bothers me is the correct line of action I ought to pursue.'

'You ought to have spoken out before, Marc. You have done this young man a great injustice by suppressing the truth.'

Mr. Tidd made a wry face.

'That sounds as though I had a motive for keeping it dark. I hadn't! But I gave the Marquis a chance of proving his manliness and honesty. Who'd have guessed that he didn't possess either quality? It wasn't my business; it was his. I don't care a hang for titles myself. Why should I be the one to help to spoil a

good workman in order to make a bad peer ?'

The American tried to treat the matter as a joke, but Celia could see that he was very much perturbed in spirit. She left him to think it out, and proceeded indoors to have some lunch.

She also was interested in this new state of things. The Marquis had been very civil to her, though not in the least cordial. But she was interested principally because he was associated indirectly with another person who occupied a much more prominent place in her thoughts.

The little doll's house was, in its way, as delightful as its surroundings. Everything about it was dainty, quaint, grotesque, yet beautiful, finished to perfection, and highly polished from the floor to the ceiling.

The flowers that bloomed without in such profusion were repeated upon the walls within, with a freshness and a delicacy un-

known to artists of other lands. The painter of them had gone straight to Nature, and interpreted her lovingly, and with infinite patience.

Even the quaint, ugly, daintily-attired little Japanese who did the work of the house added to the general charm of the scene.

But, alas ! it must be confessed that their cookery did not prove alluring to Celia's dainty palate, and she made short work of her luncheon.

She rejoined Marc, who was by this time in possession of all the information his pile of newspapers could give him.

'I must start at once, Celia,' he said with decision ; 'there is not a moment to lose if I want to help that poor boy, and it's clearly my duty to do so.'

Celia's expressive countenance grew instantly radiant with delight. Then she stole a mischievous look at Marc Aurelius.

'I suppose you won't wait for me if you

are in such a hurry?' she remarked with demureness.

Her brother laughed.

'Go along and pack up,' he answered, 'and let me see how quick you can be about it, or I won't answer for my patience. You little humbug!'

Celia fled at once.

CHAPTER XLI.

LORD CRANBERY FINDS HIS HAPPINESS.

MISS TIDD experienced a pleasurable sensation when once again her feet were set upon the pavements of grimy old London. By nature just oppositely constituted to her brother, she was never so much at ease as when mingling with a crowd of people. She was certainly not formed for a secluded or savage existence. She had indeed grown to confess as much by this time. Her journey in search of the adventurous was therefore a complete mistake.

The season was at its height. It was a very gay and prosperous one, the best for some years back ; good for West - End

tradesmen, and all the purveyors of luxury and high living. Every place was crowded; and through all the great arteries of traffic flowed one continuous stream of humanity—driving, walking, hurrying, sauntering.

Celia was sitting upon one of the seats beneath a tree in the Green Park, awaiting the arrival of Marc Aurelius, who had promised to meet her there and to do some of the picture-galleries with her. The American was, in his way, really fond of art, though he steadfastly declined to allow the critics to decide for him the particular pictures he ought or ought not to admire.

It was very pleasant, sitting there in the shade. The stream of carriages passed unceasingly along Piccadilly, but here the sound of their wheels was deadened to a murmur, until it sounded like the distant music of a throbbing sea. The morning sunshine was filtering through the leaves of the sycamore-tree overhead, and turning their young and vivid green to a brilliant

golden hue. Children were running about in merry pastime, while their nursemaids read penny numbers or indulged in flirtations with divers sons of Mars.

Miss Tidd was holding her parasol low down, to escape the too ardent sunbeams, and consequently did not notice the approach of a pedestrian, who hesitated, then stopped, with a cry of delighted surprise.

‘Celia! Miss Tidd! I can scarce believe my eyes. This is indeed an unexpected pleasure!’

‘Why unexpected? Is it so extraordinary that I should follow the rest of the world to town, Lord Cranbery?’ asked Celia, with not quite her usual self-possession.

‘But I was informed that you had become infected with the adventurous spirit of your brother, and had flown from civilization and its tame conventionalities. I was told that you meant to abide for an indefinite period in the wilds of Japan.’

‘One doesn’t abide for an indefinite period in the wilds of anywhere,’ returned Miss Tidd laughingly; ‘I can assure you that I am much too sophisticated a person to do without my accustomed luxuries for very long together.’

‘I am charmed to hear it! Had it not been so, I also should have had to come travelling in your wake. And I’m not at all sure that either the climate or the food would have suited me!’ ended Lord Cranbery, in a plaintive tone.

‘I can solve that question. The climate is superb: bright, and clear, and full of a delicious freshness. When one awakes there in the morning one feels as though one were newly created, with all one’s powers and faculties young and vigorous. So much for the climate. But the food? That is another matter. Words fail to describe its unimaginable horrors! Take my advice, Lord Cranbery, and give up any idea of ever visiting Japan. You are much

too dyspeptic a subject for such a risky experiment !

‘ And yet it does not appear to have had any detrimental effect upon you, Miss Tidd,’ remarked Lord Cranbery, gazing, with rapt adoration, at the face of his divinity ; ‘ I do not remember ever to have seen you look so well—so charming, if you will permit me to say so.’

‘ Flatterer!’ murmured Celia reprovingly. Was there anything of a like complimentary nature she could say of him? Alas, no! The young nobleman appeared very much out of sorts indeed ; pale, thin, and with a haggard expression, produced, most probably, by those sleepless nights he had been experiencing of late—nights when he had tossed restlessly from side to side, tormented in turn by the demon neuralgia and by thoughts of Celia herself.

As the American girl looked into his worn face a rush of pity came over her.

Was this sad change partly her own

work? If so, then was she, in truth, much to blame!

‘You are not looking well, Lord Cranberry,’ she said abruptly. ‘I hope there is nothing serious the matter with you?’

‘No; I think not. I am not very robust at the best of times, and lately I haven’t cared what became of me. Perhaps it is only that I’ve been so unhappy. It will be different now!’

A radiant expression broke over his features at the last words—an expression whose meaning Miss Tidd could not avoid surmising. She was touched by this evidence of her power.

There was something in his tone also that aroused considerable astonishment within her breast. When he had seen her last, he had spoken as one who loved her indeed, but one who loved hopelessly, and without daring to ask for any return of that affection. What was the meaning of this transformation?

She had just returned to town. No news concerning his affairs had as yet reached her. Wherefore she was perplexed in mind when he talked of following her to the wilds of Japan, as though he had a perfect right so to do. It was passing strange !

But she decided to ignore all that excited her wonder, and to talk of his concerns as though their position was identically the same as when she left England, six months before.

‘I am surprised to hear of your unhappiness,’ she said, with something approaching disdain. ‘I thought engaged persons were always in the seventh heaven of bliss. But perhaps that stage is past with you—perhaps, indeed, I ought to congratulate you upon your marriage instead? If I have omitted what is your just due, pray forgive me, Lord Cranbery, because of the fact that I am entirely ignorant of what has been going on in the world for the past few months.’

During the progress of Celia's speech Lord Cranbery had alternately flushed and paled; and now he simply subsided into the seat by her side, and looked at her in a bewildered fashion.

'You do not know—you do not know, then?' he gasped.

'Know? Know what? Don't I tell you that I couldn't have been "out of it" more completely if I had gone to heaven, instead of only to Japan! Please tell me what it is that I ought to know. I hate to be left to make all sorts of queer surmises!'

'My engagement with Nora is at an end!'

'Your engagement broken? How? You have not—have not——'

Celia was, in turn, confused, and could not manage to frame her sentence so as to finish it without awkwardness.

'No! It was the other way. Nora refused to marry me. She declared that

we were entirely unsuited to each other in tastes and disposition—and, indeed, it is perfectly true!’ ended the rejected one, with complete and satisfied acquiescence.

‘I—I am sorry—at least, I suppose—*ought* I to say that I am sorry?’ asked Celia, laughing at her own awkwardness.

So this was what the change in his manner meant!

Lord Cranbery took the prettily-gloved hand of Miss Tidd in his own, and held it firmly.

‘No, indeed, dear Celia, you ought to say nothing of the kind! Say instead that you are glad—I am free to follow the dictates of my heart. Say that you will try to love me, darling!’

‘Oh, but, Lord Cranbery, I—I must not make any such rash promise. How can I tell whether we are any better suited to each other than were your cousin and you?’

Lord Cranbery’s countenance fell.

‘I know that I’m but a poor sort of a fellow, and all unworthy of your regard,’ he said humbly; ‘but, Celia dearest, no man could love you more truly, even though he were ever so much cleverer and better looking!’

‘It is not that! You are altogether too modest. Besides, I prize heart more than anything else.’

‘Then what is it, Celia? Do not, for pity’s sake—do not play with me! If you but care for me half as much as I do for you, there is nothing that ought to stand between us.’

Celia gave an odd little glance from under her long eyelashes.

‘I am thinking of a stupid blunder that Marc once made about me,’ she said hurriedly. ‘Lord Cranbery, I want you to answer me one question: Did something that passed between my brother and Mr. Luxmore long ago, in the artist’s studio, influence your thoughts of me in any way?’

Did it make you think less of American girls—think them wanting in delicacy, perhaps ?

‘I haven’t the least idea what you allude to, Miss Tidd,’ answered Lord Cranberry at once, in genuine distress ; ‘but I certainly never heard anything, either in Luxmore’s studio or elsewhere, that could influence me into thinking less respectfully of American girls. And as for my thoughts of you, why, Celia, ever since the first moment I saw you—a moment I remember quite well, and I could tell you all you said and did and wore upon that occasion—you have been to me the embodiment of all that is great and good and pure in woman. How *could* anything influence me except just you—yourself? You took possession of me then, and you have kept it ever since.’

Cynical and worldly as Celia Tidd imagined herself to be, she could not doubt him longer. Love and truth spoke in his eager, unstudied words. It was quite evident that

if that stupid speech of hers had been repeated to him he had paid no heed to it. And to think of all the humiliation and blushes it had cost her! 'It was all the fault of that horrid little Zachary Luxmore,' she murmured to herself, thinking of the envenomed sting he had given to her in their last interview. 'I might have guessed he was fooling me out of spite. It makes me mad to think how ashamed I have been!'

'What is that you are saying, Celia?' asked Lord Cranbery tenderly; 'remember that I am still in suspense. Surely you will give me a little hope?'

'How much hope will suffice to keep you from despair?' asked the American girl, laughing, and then, holding out her finger, she measured off about an inch. 'Will that do, Lord Cranbery?'

Lord Cranbery took the whole hand for answer.

'I am afraid I shall have to claim it all,'

he said with decision. 'Celia, you won't keep me waiting long? I have been so dreadfully unhappy.'

'What will your aunt the Duchess say?' asked Celia suddenly, after an interval of blissful silence.

Lord Cranbery professed that he did not know.

'Well, then, I do,' responded Miss Tidd at once: 'she will say, "That horrid American woman! what infatuation!"'

Although Miss Tidd had only been once in the presence of her Grace, and upon that occasion had but watched her from afar, she yet imitated the Duchess's ponderous tones to perfection.

Lord Cranbery laughed.

'What will your brother say? That is to me a more important question.'

'Here he comes to answer for himself,' said Celia, as the tall, gaunt form of Marc Aurelius came in sight, lounging along in the laziest of fashions, his hat on the back of

his head, and his eyes upturned to the blue sky.

‘Do you know that I feel very much afraid of Mr. Tidd?’ murmured Lord Cranbery in an awestruck voice; ‘perhaps he will be like the brother of that American girl in one of Henry James’s stories, the one who hates the Britishers with such a savage hatred.’

‘At least, I can promise you that I won’t follow the example of the heroine of the story you refer to, and poison myself through dread of Marc,’ responded Miss Tidd. ‘He is a dear old fellow, and hasn’t it in him to hate any living creature. Of course he would rather have me marry an American citizen, but if I am happy he will be quite content.’

‘What! you here, Lord Cranbery?’ said Mr. Tidd, looking from one to the other with his quiet, sleepy eyes. ‘I hope you are all right, though I guess you don’t look quite up to the mark. Not married yet,

eh? Nice little girl, that Lady Nora! looks natural, too—more than we can say for the majority of your thoroughbred English girls.'

'I am not—that is to say, my cousin would not marry me, after all!' stammered Lord Cranberry in dire confusion.

'What! threw you over, did she? Queer cattle, women — never know their own minds two days together. Tolerably hard lines for you, though, all the same.'

'Oh, but indeed it was the kindest thing Nora could do. She guessed that I did not love her, and asked me the question straight. Mr. Tidd, it is your sister whom I love, whom I have loved ever since I first met her.'

The American gave a low whistle.

'And what answer has Celia given you, for I calculate you've asked her the question by this time?'

'I gave him one finger, and he took my

whole hand,' replied Celia, a smile dimpling the corner of her beautiful mouth.

'Well, I guess you've both had time enough to know your own minds, so there's small use in my interfering in the matter.'

'But you'll be good and kind, Marc, and try to like him, for my sake?' pleaded Miss Tidd; 'you know he can't help not having been born a citizen of the U.S.A.'

'You little humbug! as if you would have cared for a simple American citizen! You know you had set your mind upon——'

Here Celia gave a little scream, and put her fingers on his lips.

'You mustn't! Oh, you mustn't, or you will spoil all!' she whispered earnestly; 'he doesn't remember anything about it, so please, Marc, let it be forgotten.'

'As you like, Celia, my dear. But you always do contrive to have your own way in the end, even about such trivial matters as marrying into—— Hem! Lord Cranberry, I hope you will find my sister a more

satisfactory companion than I have done for the past six months. It appears to me that you must have had something to do with her insuperable distaste for everything Japanese.'

'Marc, how can you be so foolish!' said Celia, but she looked so affectionately at her lover that he thought it quite possible that the supposition was true. He was, indeed, so happy that everything was possible.

'And I suppose, when you do get married, you two foolish young people will proceed with your work of reforming the world at a terrible rate, instead of being sensible, and resting contented with your own share of happiness?'

'Happiness ought not to make one selfish,' said Lord Cranberry quietly.

'It does, though, tolerably often. Well, all I ask of you is that you don't kill yourselves over the business; because Celia is the only relative I have left to my old age, and I can't spare her, although

it appears to me she doesn't return the compliment.'

'Indeed I do, Marc. Now, don't you begin to be jealous, or I shall have to scold you. And as for doing good, why, you do as much as both of us put together, only you make no fuss about it.'

'You don't know anything to base such an opinion on. But listen here: I didn't come here to-day to exchange pretty speeches with a future Lady Cranbery. I must tell you that I'm in a hurry, too.'

Mr. Tidd proceeded to explain that he had merely come to beg leave of absence for that day, since he had been invited to meet a celebrated traveller, a compatriot, at luncheon. He would therefore be grateful if Lord Cranbery would escort Celia to the galleries in his place—a request to which the young nobleman was only too delighted to accede.

'And I think, if Larkcom does me the honour to ask me to join the new expedition

to Africa which he is planning, I couldn't do better than go. But I reckon I'd have to take you home first, Celia,' he went on thoughtfully, but with a gleam of fun in his eyes.

Miss Tidd gave a cry of dismay.

'But I am not going home.'

'Back to the States!' exclaimed Lord Cranbery, with an echo of her dismay. 'No, indeed; that would be too cruel. But I'll tell you what, Mr. Tidd,' he went on, with a sudden inspiration; 'Larkcom won't be ready to start for another month or six weeks, and I could take care of Celia after that, you know.'

'Thank you,' exclaimed Miss Tidd, holding her head very high; 'but there is no need of such terrific haste. If Marc wants to be rid of me all at once I dare say there are plenty of people ready to chaperone me. Mrs. Bloffit, for instance—she has begged me to go and stay with her time after time.'

‘But don’t you see how much nicer it would be for us to be married before your brother leaves?’ pleaded Lord Cranbery eagerly. ‘Of course, it would be the right thing for him to give you away, and if anything should happen to delay his return——’

‘My dear Celia, your adorer has some reason on his side,’ Marc said, as Lord Cranbery hesitated a little. ‘He is possessed with an anxiety which I do not flatter myself arises from any personal regard for me. But if, for example, a lion should take a fancy to dine off my spare carcase—a rather unlikely contingency, by the way,’ he went on to remark, holding out and regarding critically a lean and sinewy forearm, ‘unless, indeed, the aforesaid lion believes in the adage, “The nearer the bone the sweeter the meat.” But, still, it *might* happen, you know; and in that case——’

‘Marc, you are quite too horrid!’ exclaimed his sister. ‘I propose that we

leave you to repent of your evil doings, while we proceed to look at the pictures.'

'By the way, you will miss those by your favourite artist this season, Lord Cranbery,' said Marc Aurelius, as they rose from the seat.

'My favourite artist? I didn't know that I had one,' remarked Lord Cranbery, rather puzzled. Then a light broke in upon him. 'Oh, you are chaffing, as usual! I suppose you mean Luxmore. No; I heard that he was not exhibiting.'

'He has gone to Syria, in order to study realistic effects for his religious pictures. Do him no end of good, I think—take some of his Parisian style out of him. Perhaps we may find less of Jan Van Beers and more of Holman Hunt in him when he returns.'

Lord Cranbery felt sorry for the little artist. His own happiness made him sympathetic over the pain of his unsuccessful rival.

But Celia acknowledged to herself that the absence of Zachary Luxmore was a great relief. She knew that she was not blameless in the matter, and feared the Nemesis of her flirtation might take a form that would prove disagreeable hereafter.

CHAPTER XLII.

MR. TIDD HAS AN INTERVIEW.

BUT some news that reached Mr. Tidd soon after he returned to town induced him to put aside, for the time at least, any idea of joining the great explorer in the new expedition that was being planned.

It was not pleasant news, to judge by the way the American received it. Roused for once out of his sleepy, lackadaisical manner, he cursed both loud and deep the selfishness and duplicity of human nature in general, and of the British aristocracy in particular.

A great and righteous indignation grew within his breast as he heard the particulars of Bertie Shelburne's arrest and condemna-

tion. He had no personal interest in the young fellow, upon whom, indeed, he had never set eyes; but the circumstances of the case awakened the ready sympathy of the freeborn citizen, and made him at once a zealous partisan of what he took to be the cause of the oppressed against the oppressor.

‘Confound it all! If I didn’t just guess that that smooth-spoken, superior-looking young aristocrat wasn’t clean grit all through. And yet I must needs go and trust to his honour—which was nil—and gallivant off to the other side of the world, to keep Miss Celia out of the way of the other one—very unnecessary that, as it turns out—and leave him to work what mischief he chose. Marc A. Tidd, you’re a fool! Find it out every day of your life, my friend!’

He sat some time thinking deeply after reading up in the file of a newspaper. It was in the smoking-room of the Travellers’ Club, and there were very few people about

that morning to disturb his meditations. He was determined to do his best in the cause of truth and justice. This time, at least, there should be no mistake for which he should have cause to reproach himself. He would not err on the side of overtrustfulness. And yet it appeared to him on mature consideration to be just to give the man in possession one more chance of abdicating, or at least of behaving with some sort of honour.

The result of Mr. Tidd's prolonged meditation was a note written to the Marquis, asking for an interview upon urgent business as soon as that nobleman could make it convenient.

The Marquis was at breakfast when the note was handed to him. He knew the writing instantly, although he had only seen it once before, and it gave him a stab of premonitory pain.

He glanced furtively at his wife, and laid the envelope on one side, unopened. Fortunately for him, the Marchioness was not an

observant woman, or she must have noticed the strange, drawn look that crept over his face. She considered curiosity a vulgar passion, and so made no reference to the unopened missive.

But she did wonder uneasily why Carabas made such a poor breakfast. She was beginning to be fond of the man, as well as proud of the Marquis, and his restless, irritable moods and fits of moody abstraction, alternating as they did with bursts of unnatural gaiety, impressed her with a vague sense of dread.

That he could be uneasy about that ridiculous claim never struck her at all. The thing was too preposterous to trouble the serenity of his mind. It was the strain of the long session, the hard work he had had forced upon him—all this was telling unfavourably upon his health, and consequently upon his mind.

Meantime the Marquis went through the misery until he could venture to withdraw

to his library and open the note without any eyes to see him do it.

He had committed a crime, and not only a crime, but what is worse — a mistake. Following his first mad impulse of terror, he had taken a step that was irrevocable. He had reaped the reward of his temerity. The only man of whom he had been afraid had left England immediately afterwards, and made no further sign. Then, hardening in sin, the Marquis had calmly gone on his dishonourable course, apparently unchecked and unheeded. He had gained the desire of his heart, but it brought him no satisfaction, no rest, no easiness.

Nevertheless, he was not in the least inclined to give up the battle. It was more intolerable now than ever to imagine that those eyes of his wife should rest upon him in scorn and contempt.

He opened the envelope at last. Its contents were exactly what he had dreaded.

Mr. Tidd's letter was very simply worded,

but it contained a spell of power. The writer had heard that the Marquis of Carabas was very much occupied with Parliamentary business, and was reluctant either to intrude upon him or to interfere with his engagements. 'However,' wrote the American, 'I am anxious to see your lordship on what you will consider to be important business. It need not consume more than half an hour or so. If you can spare time for so short an interview, I shall be glad to meet you anywhere at your convenience.'

That terrible American! He had returned to London, then!

The Marquis preferred that the meeting should take place at Mr. Tidd's hotel. He did not dare to risk a meeting between this man and the Marchioness. He had no doubt whatever as to the nature of the business. Mr. Tidd, having heard of the still pending legal proceedings, and presuming, perhaps, that he had a greater

interest in the affair than circumstances justified, had come to make inquiry as to the papers which he had placed in the possession of the Marquis.

The situation was decidedly awkward. How much did Mr. Tidd know of what the papers contained? To have been aware of the true answer to that question would have made the prospective interview immeasurably less embarrassing. The Marquis could, in one case, have offered a safe and easy explanation; and, in the other, he could have treated Mr. Tidd frankly as an enemy if need to do so should appear. But in the present uncertainty it was quite impossible to arrange one's demeanour beforehand.

The Shelburne claim was now rapidly approaching a critical stage. Before long it would come before the Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords. The tribunal was such a one as would naturally be prejudiced in favour of the incumbent of the title. In the Marquis's mind this was

almost the sole ground of hope that remained. He had convinced himself that Bertie Shelburne was the actual and legitimate son of his scapegrace cousin. On that subject he knew much more than the lawyers, the documents which he had committed to the flames, and of which the said lawyers had no knowledge, being the necessary loops of connection between that Marquis of Carabas who died a violent death in Alaska and the Mr. Shelburne who had married Bessie Dean in an obscure London church.

At present the identification was based on the packet of letters which Bessie Dean had religiously preserved for so many years. Undoubtedly they were all addressed to Bexley, and dealt with Bexley's affairs. But anyone might come into possession of a packet of letters. It might be picked up in the street; it might be left in a train or omnibus; it might pass from the owner to a person totally unconnected with him

through the sale and the purchase of an old coat.

The lawyers who were acting for Bertie, or rather for those who were prosecuting his claims, were fully aware of the weak parts of their case. Some very considerable assumptions had to be made ; but there was plenty of money behind them, and it was decidedly to their interest to go on.

Had they known what the Marquis knew they would have felt certain of victory. Even in his knowledge, however, there was one hiatus. He had unaccountably omitted to take note, as has already been said, of the name of the woman whom Bexley had made his wife ; but there was now in his own mind no doubt that her name had been Dean. If the case had been otherwise, had there been another Mrs. Shelburne somewhere, the great publicity given for months past to the forthcoming *cause célèbre* would undoubtedly have caused the true wife to appear. Again the question arose as to

what was actually known by Mr. Marc Aurelius Tidd.

The whole affair had made the Marquis of Carabas so unhappy that he told himself that he could have quite contentedly gone back to his former position, had it not been for his marriage. Indeed, under the pressure of this intolerable suspense, he would have gone back in any case had his wife been content to sink with him. But on that subject he had ascertained her feelings, and he perceived clearly that his choice lay between the woman whom he loved and a path of conduct that he would have taken if he had not loved her. He must now do whatever was necessary to retain her esteem and affection; and with that determination he went to meet Mr. Marc Aurelius Tidd.

The greeting was not cordial on either side.

‘I should have invited you to come to my house,’ said the Marquis; ‘but you spoke of business, and business is almost impossible

there at the present time. We have so many engagements !'

'It is better that your lordship has come here,' said Mr. Tidd gravely, but not unkindly.

'I assumed, of course, that your business must be very important, or you would not have asked so peremptorily for a meeting,' the Marquis said.

'That is as you may think,' said Mr. Tidd. 'It seems important to me. I am burdened with the trust of a dead man. I didn't seek it. I don't like trusts of any kind. I guess I should be as well pleased to be out of this affair as you would be to see me get.'

'I confess that I don't quite understand you, Mr. Tidd.'

'Oh, you don't? That's rather odd. I will try to make myself quite plain, then. There was a parcel of papers I gave you.'

The statement was made in a questioning and tentative way. Mr. Tidd looked ex-

ceedingly lazy and lackadaisical, but was making very good use of his eyes all the while.

‘And as to the papers, Mr. Tidd?’

The lids of the sleepy-looking eyes lifted suddenly, and dropped again.

‘Well, I kind of surmised that they might make some difference to you.’

‘How, for instance?’

‘They were chiefly in the handwriting of your cousin, I guess. They told a queer story enough—how he married a poor woman here in England; how he had left her; how there was a son before he left, and all the rest of it. It wouldn’t be a pleasant thing for the Marquis of Carabas if all that was true, I think!’

‘And therefore you infer, Mr. Tidd——’

The Marquis was beginning to feel that perhaps this was a man who might be smoothed over.

‘I infer nothing. I gave you the papers, and left the inference to you. I might have

inferred a good deal if I had been the Marquis of Carabas.'

'I am afraid that I may seem to repeat myself. Permit me to ask what, for instance?'

Mr. Tidd's drooping eyelashes again lifted.

'Why, for instance,' he said, 'that I was not the true Marquis of Carabas. I might have been sort of inclined to look up the real heir. It would never have occurred to me,' said Mr. Tidd, with unexpected energy and directness, 'to put him in prison.'

The Marquis perceived at once that whatever the papers had contained was not unknown to Mr. Tidd.

'You Americans seem to leap very rapidly to conclusions,' he said. 'A young man is induced to set up a claim to my estates and title, and you immediately conclude that I must at once surrender to his claim. What grounds have you for thinking that the claim is so much as reasonable?'

‘The grounds that I placed in your hands, my lord.’

‘Oh, the papers! I am bound to tell you that they—they are destroyed.’ It took an effort to get out the ugly word.

Mr. Tidd breathed through his lips in a manner that almost produced a whistle. It sounded like a prolonged ‘Whew!’

‘I didn’t think that of you, though,’ he said; ‘I kind of trusted you. As the English nobility goes, you seemed to me a tolerably fine specimen. I can’t understand it, I admit.’

‘Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Tidd,’ said the Marquis, terribly conscious that he was lying, ‘I glanced very casually through the papers, came to the conclusion that they were of no real importance, and committed them to the fire as documents which could only be still further injurious to my deceased cousin’s reputation.’

Mr. Marc Aurelius Tidd rose to his feet.

‘It seems to me,’ he said, ‘as if we were

only losing time in being civil to each other. I have no manner of doubt that you hate me like poison; while I—hang it!—I was a fool to trust a British nobleman—that's all. Those papers proved that your cousin, the Marquis of Carabas, left a son. That son may be dead or alive—I don't know; it was for you to find out. But I surmise that he is this young man who is now in gaol. If that were the fact, you would no longer be Marquis of Carabas. Well, I trusted you, like an idiot, and you burnt the papers that might have told the truth!

‘You surmise and you surmise, Mr. Tidd; but do you not surmise more than the papers contained?’

‘Now, how could I?’ asked Mr. Tidd. ‘I'm not good at building up romances. I have seen a good deal of the world. In my time I have travelled and observed a lot. Do you really think that I should give those papers up to you without knowing what was in them?’

‘But you may have misconstrued their meaning,’ said the Marquis, grasping at straws. ‘They were voluminous—how can you remember their contents, even?’

Mr. Tidd looked up with a face wearing a smile of scorn.

‘Because I am a citizen of the United States,’ he said. ‘You have played a bold game, my lord, but I still hold trumps. I had those papers copied at Washington, and the copies were stamped. They are in one of my trunks in this hotel.’

The Marquis was as proud a man as lived in all England, but the information quite humbled him. He had no further powers of defence left, except such as were consonant neither with pride nor nobility of nature. He made a false and stupid move.

‘Mr. Tidd,’ he said, after a long pause, ‘I would pay a great deal for those copies;’ and then in a moment he remembered the renowned wealth of the Tidd family.

‘I dare say,’ responded Mr. Tidd.

The American's hand was travelling towards the electric bell. The proud Marquis of Carabas seized him by the wrist.

'I—I beg your pardon,' he said impetuously ; 'I was half mad, and knew not what I said. Do not mistake me—do not misunderstand me. I plead to you as one whom an act of yours may make a broken man. I am married to a woman who is ambitious and proud ; I love her with my whole soul. That is the trouble of it. If you will believe me, I would abandon this contest at once if it were not for her. It is for her sake that I am humble before you. You can degrade and disgrace me in her eyes and those of the world. The world's scorn I *could* bear, but not hers—not hers ! What inducement can you have to wreck a life like mine ?

'None whatever, my lord,' said Mr. Tidd. 'It is the fault of you English aristocrats that you explain everything by some selfish inducement. I am merely a man who received an unexpected trust, as if from the

dead. I received that trust as a duty, and mean to fulfil it as an obligation. As I understand you, you first propose to bribe me to an opposite course, and then appeal to my pity. Is not that so ?

Lord Carabas now understood his man better. A spirit of defiance rose within him, the stronger because he was disgusted with himself.

‘ I said nothing of a bribe. What have I to bribe you for ? You have certain papers that you allege to be copies of papers delivered to me. You will produce them, I suppose, in the inquiry before the Committee of Privileges. Very well ; I shall denounce them for what they are—I shall denounce them as forgeries !’

Mr. Tidd looked at the Marquis with a queer, quizzical stare. He was studying human nature, of which this was quite a novel phase.

There was no more to be said on either side, so the interview terminated.

But for hours afterwards Mr. Marc A. Tidd was haunted by the terrible expression in the eyes of the man whom he had checkmated; and, despite his own conviction of the justice of the cause he was defending, those eyes troubled and perplexed him. The Marquis was an impostor, and knew it; nevertheless, he had human emotions in his breast, however he might strive out of bravado to hide them, and the despair which had taken possession of him was eating away his moral fibres, and making a coward of him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES.

‘You were at the Carabas’ party last night, I suppose?’ said Mr. Halliwell Romaine to Lord Ronald Tunbridge.

‘No, indeed! I was not asked,’ said Lord Ronald, with more than his usual sharpness of manner.

This was the explanation. He was suffering from a rude, even a violent, shock to his self-conceit. He had lately resigned his place in the Ministry, in the expectation that he would thus be able to command higher terms; but the resignation had been accepted without even so much as an expression of regret, and, worst of all, those on whom Lord

Ronald had relied for comfort and support in any emergency had turned round upon him with terms of abuse or contempt because he had endeavoured to embarrass the Ministry at a critical moment, and in face of a watchful and active foe.

‘Hum!’ said Mr. Romaine, who was proposing to himself to trounce Lord Ronald in the *Quarterly*, to which he occasionally contributed a survey of the political position.

‘You know what that means, I suppose?’

‘Simply that I am not *persona grata* with Carabas.’

‘Nonsense! It means that in the opinion of the Marchioness your fall is a final collapse. I have good reason for knowing that Carabas does not even so much as see the list of invitations sent out; everything is left to the woman. And what a woman she is! There has been no such petticoated politician since I was a young man, by Jove! She will make her husband Prime Minister, you may depend upon it.’

‘Don’t be too sure of that, my sanguine friend. This business of the inquiry may prove more serious than you seem to imagine.’

‘Pooh! nonsense! Only a mare’s-nest found by that mock Don Quixote of a journalist you are so fond of quoting. I wouldn’t give a fig for the young mechanic’s chance of a marquise.’

‘Time will show,’ returned Lord Ronald solemnly. ‘Meantime, you must allow that Carabas looks confoundedly peaked and out of sorts.’

‘Like enough, poor chap! Look at the work they keep forcing upon him. If some folks will persist in overrating themselves, and being dispensed with in consequence, it generally ends in others having to overwork to make up for it.’

The tone was quiet, but there was no mistaking the meaning of the speech, and Lord Ronald was not a big enough man to laugh off such remarks. He sauntered away,

therefore, without waiting for more, and with his nose rather high in the air. His own ambitions had soared very high, and this seemed the period of greatest declension in his prospects. The fact that he had not been invited to the latest party of the Marchioness of Carabas undoubtedly meant that he was regarded in that quarter as a person of no account. His successor in the Ministry had been present, as might be seen from the account of the festivity given in the *Morning Post*. The list of guests proved that the Marchioness not only had an object in these gatherings, but possessed a really remarkable power of discrimination. There had been present every man of position and influence on her husband's side in politics, together with those others whom it was necessary to conciliate, and who might yet prove useful.

It was bitterly plain to Lord Ronald that he was not thought to be worth the trouble of conciliation.

In the smoke-room of the club he encountered Tony Lirriper, and the pair went for a stroll in St. James's Park.

'Old Romaine is full of the Carabas gathering,' said Lord Ronald. 'He was not there, of course; but he will be at the next, you may be sure, or there is no longer any virtue in the science of booing.'

'My Lady Carabas manages those parties very well,' said Lirriper. 'She is aiming at big things, and she will reach her mark if this trial about the succession turns out all right.'

'And don't you think it will?' Lord Ronald asked. He had his own ideas, which he wished to hear confirmed.

'Things are beginning to look considerably queer, I am told,' was the response. 'There is a Yankee fellow named Tidd who has been got hold of by the other side. Sister going to marry little Cranbery, they say. Heaps of money. Cranbery threw over Lady Nora Challoner in order to make up to the

American. Shouldn't have thought he had it in him.'

'But how does this Tidd come into the affair?'

'Knew Bexley somehow. Was in at the death, I believe,' said Tony Lirriper. 'That was out in Alaska, you know—frightful wild place! Got a confession, I shouldn't wonder. Anyhow, the other side is very big about what he will have to tell.'

'The hearing comes on very shortly, doesn't it?'

'In three weeks. Will last into the autumn, I should think. The Lords have made these succession trials about the slowest things ever devised by the wit of man.'

'Well,' said Lord Ronald, 'it will be all up a spout with Carabas if the decision goes against him.'

'Oh, I don't know,' Tony observed. 'He would go back to the House of Commons, you know. Must always be a powerful man, Carabas. He is such a very safe, steady-

going chap; just the opposite of yourself, in fact.'

Lord Ronald winced. Everyone was down on him just now.

'But there will be an end of these swell parties, no doubt.' He was feeling meanly vindictive.

'Oh, of course; there will be none of that sort of thing possible under the altered conditions. Lady Ermyntrude had next to nothing, I believe. They will be as poor as church-mice.'

Tony Lirriper had a curious, investigating mind. He was popular in society because he usually possessed the latest information on most subjects, and because he had an entertaining, careless, happy-go-lucky manner of conveying it to others. He was right to within a day or two as to the date at which the Carabas peerage case was to be taken by the House of Lords. In matters of such deep moment to their order the peers are the first and the final judges. They do not

permit any inferior court to come between the wind and their nobility.

This was productive of much disappointment. Ill-informed as to an infrequent mode of procedure, a large part of that section of mankind which is usually styled the general public had been under the impression that the case of *Shelburne v. the Marquis of Carabas* would come before the ordinary courts, and when the truth became known it felt that it had been defrauded of a sensation. The courts had recently begun to compete with the theatres in attractiveness. Admission had, on several occasions, been by ticket, and the wife of a well-known judge, accompanied by a bevy of ladies of fashion, had day by day, throughout a long trial, sat beside her husband on the bench.

Nothing of this kind was possible in the House of Lords. Practically, the '*Shelburne Peerage Case*,' as it was called in the newspapers, was an affair for the reporters only.

Before the commencement of proceedings Mr. Wilbraham Tweed made a desperate attempt to procure the liberation of Bertie Shelburne. He reviewed all the evidence that had been given at the trial, and pronounced it contradictory and worthless; he published the lad's biography, extracted from Bessie in moments more confidential than that in which he first called at Magnolia Street, Peppermint Hill; he set out in detail all such particulars of the claim as had become known to him, illustrating the account by portraits of Lord Bexley and Bertie Shelburne, in which a decided likeness was shown; and then he wound up by a strong representation of the cruel injustice of producing in the House of Lords, as a prisoner under the charge of warders, one who in a few weeks' time, in a few days' time, even, might have the right to take his seat in that chamber as the representative of one of the really historic peerages, of a line of nobility which was scarcely inferior in

rank, in distinction, in antiquity, to that of those who made it their boast that in their patrician veins flowed 'all the blood of all the Howards.'

'The Home Secretary,' wrote Mr. Tweed, 'has made many frightful mistakes, and countenanced many distinct acts of injustice, since he held his present office. He has now an opportunity of atonement. Let him earn the goodwill of the nation by doing in this instance what is dignified, sensible, and humane.'

However, Mr. Wilbraham Tweed found the business of governing others somewhat more than usually difficult in this instance. The Home Secretary simply took no notice. The great case was allowed to go on without Ministerial interference on one side or the other.

Since the session commenced, the Marquis of Carabas had distinguished himself in Parliament no less than his wife had made herself talked about by her activities as

hostess. The House of Lords had been more than usually well-engaged for that season of the year. Two or three Bills of first-rate importance had been introduced, and there had been several of those full-dress debates for which the Lords are renowned. In each of these the Marquis of Carabas had not only spoken well, but had spoken with an unexpected brilliancy and incisiveness. The public talked about him out of doors, and the chiefs of his party formed a new conception of his powers. He never stood so high in the opinion of the country, and especially in the opinion of Parliament, as just before the commencement of the case which was to test his right to sit in the House where he was now recognised as one of the most able men and one of the best debaters.

There were strong reasons why he should stay in town and continue his career of success. The unconcern he had hitherto exhibited in face of the forthcoming trial

had convinced everyone that he had no cause for anxiety as to the result, and it was advisable that the impression should, if possible, be deepened. It would be a bitter disappointment to the Marchioness if he should now interrupt the full tide of her entertainments. He would be needed much, also, in the further and final stages of Bills which he had defended.

Nevertheless, he was resolute on leaving London. He felt that he could not endure to watch day by day the progress of a trial which, in all probability, would bring both disaster and disgrace. He would go down to Bexley House, and there bury himself until he was called upon as a witness. The Marchioness might go or not, as she pleased ; but, for his own part, go he must. Nothing should induce him to endure this torture, at least.

It was not difficult to find an excuse other than the real one for his departure from town at a moment so critical alike for his

political and his other fortunes. He was indisputably unwell. He had been overworked, his physician said. It had been going on for some time, and he wondered he had not been called in sooner. Oh, decidedly he must have rest, and without a day's delay!

The Marchioness countermanded all her arrangements. She would accompany him to Bexley House and nurse him back to health. It was a great wrench to be compelled thus to abandon her schemes; but she would take up all the threads again next year; and already she had profited much, for she had learned the way to success.

If the Marquis could have confided in her concerning one torturing matter as to which he knew that he must most jealously guard against such confidence, he would have been helped far towards his recovery. His mind was morbidly brooding over the papers which he had destroyed. It seemed to him now that he would rather have lost everything

than have committed those papers to the fire. Mr. Marc Aurelius Tidd would tell the whole story, it was probable, in which case he would be irreparably disgraced.

Nor did his fears fail of justification by the event. Mr. Tidd was the first witness called on Bertie Shelburne's behalf. Counsel had, at immense length, laid before their lordships the main facts of the case, discussed precedents, produced pedigrees, and quoted from books of law. Dreary were all these preliminaries; yet they seemed to be stretched out to the utmost possible length, as if in a court so august, and a case of such uncommon interest, anything but a slow and leisurely demeanour must be an insult to the tribunal.

Mr. Tidd chafed under his examination, so long a pause did the counsel make to enable his answers to be taken down. But he was conscious of an air of surprise at the character of his evidence. Whilst he still remained at the table, waiting for further

questions, counsel read numerous extracts from the papers which he had produced. The reading completed, an aged peer, who had formerly been a renowned judge, proceeded to question him.

‘You tell us, Mr. Tidd, that the originals of the documents of which these are copies were discovered by you among property belonging to the late Lord Bexley, otherwise the Marquis of Carabas?’

‘That is so, my lord.’

‘And that you handed the originals of these documents to the present Marquis?’

‘Yes, my lord.’

‘That is surely a very serious statement!’

‘It is simply the truth.’

‘Did you acquaint him at the same time of the nature of the papers?’

‘No; I left him to find that out.’

‘Why did you keep silence on that point?’

‘I am a man of few words. It was not my business to talk of his family secrets. He could read them for himself.’

‘Ahem!’ said the old peer, and he sank back in his seat, silent.

‘Now, Mr. Tidd,’ said counsel, resuming his examination, ‘these documents seem to prove conclusively that Lord Bexley, under his family name of Shelburne, married a woman named Elizabeth Dean, by whom he had a son, called after himself Adelbert Shelburne. Is not that what you gather from what has been read?’

‘That is so,’ said Mr. Tidd.

‘Very well. And you gave the originals of these documents to the Marquis of Carabas, as you have told us. Did he ever say what he had done with them?’

‘Yes. He said that he had put them in the fire.’

Mr. Tidd was aware of a decided movement of surprise amongst his audience. There was then a long pause, at the close of which counsel said :

‘I have only one more question to ask you, Mr. Tidd. Did the present holder of the

title attempt to cast any doubt upon your copies, which, I perceive, have received the proper official authentication at Washington?’

‘I regret to say that he did,’ the witness answered. ‘He said that he should dispute their genuineness.’

‘And we do dispute that, my lords,’ hastily interjected one of the opposing counsel.

‘But that does not alarm you, Mr. Tidd?’ the examining counsel asked.

‘I am not in any way alarmed,’ was the reply. ‘I am here as the witness of truth, and to perform a duty to the dead and the living. I have no interests of my own to serve. I have not so much as seen the plaintiff in this case, or any of his connections. As to the genuineness of the original documents, Lord Carabas knew them to be genuine. That, in my opinion, is why he destroyed them.’

The House adjourned immediately after this evidence, which in less than an hour’s time was being circulated all over London.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE MARQUIS HAS A NIGHT'S REST.

THE Marquis was back in town, looking little the better for his holiday.

How could a man over whose head such a sharp sword hung suspended gain either health or strength? He could not forget it for a moment—night or day. In his dreams it followed him, mocked him, tantalized him, until he was ready to leap at it, and cleave the slender thread that held it, so that it might at once descend and cut him to the heart. Suspense was worse than certainty. But certainty was the end of all things.

The news was not reassuring, as it kept coming day by day.

At length came the damning evidence of the American, which produced a thrill of consternation and horror throughout all the fashionable world.

It met the Marquis at the threshold of his own door, shouted from the lips of a news-boy. He staggered back, as though shot in a vital part, and re-entered the house. It was here, then—the crisis whose shadow had been thrown upon his life for so long a period beforehand. Well, it was almost a relief to think it would be over—the dread, the suspense, the culminating horror. Over? Was that all that would be over at the same time? Would not love, esteem, and life itself be over for him after that revelation of his dishonour had taken place?

God forgive him!

He had derived little benefit from his criminal silence. The knowledge had been always there, eating the core out of his happiness, striking deep pangs of pain through all his joys, never for a moment allowing him

to forget the fact that he was at heart a mean and contemptible impostor, usurping the place and name of another man. For himself he would not have borne the intolerable weight of dishonour for a single day, after he had begun to realize it; but it would have meant the loss of the woman he loved. And then the very consummation of his hopes had fettered him with bonds from which it was impossible to break loose. He could not tell his wife—the wife he loved so passionately—that he had deceived her, that he had married her under false pretences, knowing all the while that he had no right to the very title he bestowed upon her. And he feared as much as he loved her. There was a terrible force in that cold contempt of which he knew she was capable. He recalled her words, uttered abroad :

‘For my part, I could never again believe in a man who had been guilty of a doubtful action.’

Would she forgive a dead man sooner than

a living one ? At least, he would be beyond the reach of her scorn. Then another remembrance came to him, and he shuddered. *Vive memor Lethi !*

He had drunk of the cup tendered by the ghastly eidolon of Death. What right had he amongst living and breathing mortals ?

That very morning he had calmly and carefully paved the way for a catastrophe which he knew to be imminent. He would, as much as was feasible, spare Ermyntrude any possible pangs of self-reproach. He had been obliged some time before to confess that his health was not satisfactory, and his anxious wife had insisted upon calling in Sir Hugh Triton, the medical adviser of her own family. The great man had made a careful investigation of his patient, had pounded, sounded, stethoscoped ; listened eagerly to the beating of the poor tortured human heart ; inquired into the lives and deaths of several generations of ancestors ; pronounced the Marquis to be suffering from some subtle form of

nervous exhaustion for which there appeared to be no physical reason; advised change of scene and society as soon as possible, wrote a prescription, pocketed his fee, and bowed himself out. But the Marquis did not recover tone, although he swallowed the iron tonic prescribed in quantities sufficient to have affected the iron market, and his fortnight at Bexley had been of less than no avail. And on a second visit Sir Hugh Triton looked more grave.

Then it was that the Marquis confessed to him that, under the intolerable restlessness he endured and the mental misery produced by sleeplessness, he had flown to that modern destroyer, morphia.

In fact, he produced, with some hesitation, a small phial, which the man of science implored him to throw into the fire without delay. But the Marquis shook his head.

‘I have no longer the moral courage to resist it,’ he said with sad humility; ‘I must have sleep, or I shall go mad! I tell

you I must have sleep—sleep and forgetfulness.’

The doctor looked at him with surprise. He was accustomed to all sorts of queer revelations, to the peeping out of many a bony intruder from carefully guarded cupboards. Nevertheless, that the Marquis of Carabas, whom everyone envied, a man young, physically healthy, endowed with every good gift that Fortune had in her power to bestow, still in love with his beautiful wife, a man who had made his mark in the world of politics, should speak as though life were unbearable without forgetfulness was a mystery that puzzled even his experienced mind.

‘It will soon cease to have the desired effect. You will have to go on increasing the dose continually, until it becomes the master instead of the slave. Believe me, the stories you read of the pernicious effects of that detestable habit of morphia injecting or imbibing are not at all exaggerated. I

could take you to see sights that would cure your desire to continue using it at once, by their very degradation. The will power becomes sapped, and the victim in the course of time degenerates into a shameless, flabby, soulless creature, without sufficient feeling left to be even aware of his own condition.'

The doctor spoke warmly, because he felt strongly on the subject.

The Marquis hesitated for a moment, but he replaced the little phial in his cabinet.

'It is only until we leave town,' he said pleadingly, 'only until Parliament is over. I promise you I will give it up when we go down to Bexley.'

'If you can. Well, I have done my duty. Remember that I have warned you.'

'All right. You are absolved from any consequences that may accrue,' assented the Marquis with readiness, and the interview terminated. Little did the eminent man dream that a little farce had been enacted for his especial benefit, and that, although the

Marquis had certainly taken one or two small doses of the drug, it had not as yet obtained the least power over him.

Sir Hugh Triton was a little concerned as to whether it would be well to give the Marchioness a word of caution and advice concerning the dangerous habit in which her husband was beginning to indulge, but after some consideration he decided to defer it to some future occasion, should things prove to be as he feared. It would be a cruel thing to disturb the serenity of her young happiness by such a suggestion.

* * * *

The Marquis had taken to sleeping in his dressing-room since his nights had become restless. Many a night had Ermyntrude—in the intervals of her calm and untroubled repose—heard him pacing about the room which joined her own, or sighing and moaning in his dreams as he tossed uneasily on his restless and conscience-haunted couch. But upon that particular night the silence was

complete, and Ermyntrude congratulated herself on the fact that he was having for once a good night's rest.

Ay, truly, a good night's rest, unbroken and undisturbed by troubled dreams.

She did not hear the midnight voice that wailed out a farewell to love and life :

‘Good-bye, Ermy, good-bye for ever!’ it murmured, with a passion of regret breaking through its studiously quiet tones. ‘You will never know how madly I have loved you—what a terrible price I have paid for the right to call you mine! But I do not grudge it—for—I have—loved—loved—loved you! Good-bye again, darling—it is coming—what I have longed for—rest—rest—rest and forgetfulness.’

* * * * *

‘How very quiet he is!’ said the Marchioness softly to herself, as she wrapped a dressing-gown about her, and stole in on tiptoe to look at her sleeping husband.

She paused on the threshold for a moment.

Something indefinite—was it a presentiment or a warning?—caused her to hesitate. What mysterious presence was this that met her, and opposed an icy barrier to her farther progress?

How still it was! Why, she could not even distinguish any sound of breathing! Merciful God! what had happened? She gave one startled look at the white face, lying so calmly on the pillow. Then she stretched out her hands, staggered forward, and fell on the bed by the side of her dead husband.

He did indeed sleep soundly—so soundly that nothing but the trump of the great archangel would serve to awaken him.

CHAPTER XLV.

A PHOTOGRAPH'S EXPRESSION.

CLARK, the Marquis's man, found her lying there insensible when he brought up the hot water for his master at the appointed time. Receiving no answer to his repeated summons, he became alarmed, and, turning the handle of the door, and fortunately finding it unlocked, he went in, to be instantly terrified out of his wits by the spectacle that met his gaze.

It was not long before the whole house was aroused, and someone ran in haste for the nearest doctor, and then proceeded onwards to Hanover Square for Sir Hugh Triton.

Meanwhile Clark lifted his young mistress very gently in his arms, and bore her back to the couch she had just quitted, before proceeding to use any restoratives. Alas! the merciful swoon lasted only too brief a time.

There did not appear to be any mystery about the death of the Marquis, and therefore no prolonged inquiry was considered necessary. The testimony of that eminent man, Sir Hugh Triton, was in itself sufficient for any sensible jury. The law was in this case lenient, and spared the relations any unpleasant examination. It was clearly a case of 'death from overdose of morphia taken accidentally.' The inquest was not heard of.

Too late now the physician blamed himself for not having warned Lady Ermyntrude and persuaded her to use her wifely influence against the continuance of the dangerous practice. It was only another case of the fatal and insidious effects of dabbling with drugs, especially without medical advisers—

another victim added to the long list of those who had died rather than suffer a slight and temporary inconvenience.

Of course, there were comments of all kinds in the newspapers—hints of embarrassments, miseries, entanglements, all more or less untrue. Luckily, the Marchioness never read the newspapers, unless it was to find how they had reported one of her husband's speeches; so she escaped any added misery they might have brought her. The Duchess of Dundridge, however, fumed and fretted under these cruel and insinuating paragraphs in a very undignified fashion. She felt that fate had used her very unjustly in making her family a source of public and unpleasant comment. If she had dared, she would have said more about this; but her husband for once put her down when she grumbled.

‘It is poor Ermy you ought to think about, not what the chattering magpies of journalists choose to say on the subject.

What on earth does it matter that the public is given to understand that poor Carabas took his—his confounded sleeping-draught because he had a bad conscience anent unpaid tailors' bills and cast-off mistresses? We know better. Only, if you breathe one syllable of the kind to Ermyintrude, you are certainly the most unnatural of mothers.'

'As if such a thing were possible! I think you forget yourself when you speak like that to *me*.'

But when the actual truth of the case became suspected, there was no one upon whom it pressed more hardly than the Duke himself. A more honourable man did not exist. With all his easy-going, indolent ways, his code of morality was of the strictest; and that his son-in-law should seem to have been guilty of dishonourable conduct, and should have killed himself to escape the unpleasant consequences, was a bitter thing to bear.

The Marchioness was not a quick woman.

Never in her life had she been known to jump to a conclusion. All her convictions were arrived at after study and conscientious thought, save only those to which she was born—those appertaining to the supremacy of the upper classes in respect not only to rank, but to all moral and physical conditions into the bargain. But having once arrived at a conclusion, it took a great deal to move her from it. She was saved from much unnecessary pain by her slowness of credulity and her impulsive temperament; but, on the other hand, it took her longer to forget disagreeable episodes and to banish their effects from her mind. For days after her husband's unfortunate death she kept going over and over in her mind every detail of their lives together, and dwelling upon every look and word of his that might tend to throw any light upon this catastrophe. Strange to say, she had never thoroughly believed in the narrative of Sir Hugh Triton; she simply accepted it, in the face of society, as the best

possible interpretation of the terrible thing that had befallen her. But alone with her own sad thoughts she rejected it as fantastic and improbable in the extreme. As she laboriously dwelt upon the past, and brought the light of the present to bear upon it, she slowly and by painful degrees arrived at the conclusion that she had been culpably blind, and that impulsive little Nora had been in the right of it when she had hinted in those pre-nuptial days that 'Carabas had something on his mind.'

When the revelation of his dishonour crushed her life, as it ultimately did and must, her first thought was not of this world, but of him who had fled to another from its frown. From the world's frown? Scarcely that, either. Had *she* driven him to that irrevocable act? She sat perfectly still, even while this maddening thought flared across her brain; but her white, slender hands kept clasping and unclasping themselves on her lap, as though all her life was concentrated there.

Since the first wild burst of grief on awakening from her swoon to the sense of her great loss, the Marchioness had been cold, collected, and tearless. They were all exceedingly concerned on her account.

‘Try and move her feelings in some way, your grace,’ Sir Hugh Triton said to the Duchess in an anxious tone. ‘Is there nothing you can think of to induce her to weep? These silent sorrows play the mischief with the brain. I would rather—a thousand times rather—see her tearing herself to pieces with hysterics than sitting brooding, brooding in that quiet, passionless manner.’

But they were powerless to touch the fountain of tears and induce them to flow. Lady Nora clung round her, weeping bitterly; but the beautiful eyes of the Marchioness stared calmly away from her into vacancy. She quietly removed her sister’s clinging arms.

‘Don’t, Nora dear,’ she said in a cold,

passionless voice ; 'it only disturbs me. Leave me alone ; I want to think.'

So they were fain to leave her to her silent sorrow. Had she driven him to it ? It all came back to her now : his passionate appeal at Bexley ; his breathless suspense and expectancy before their marriage ; the bitter reproach of his tone at the Pergola Theatre, when he told her she ought to have married an angel, not a sinning, suffering mortal.

Suffering ! Good God ! how he must indeed have suffered ! There was no torture that she could conceive to be greater than that he must have endured during those months which had been to her halcyon and cloudless ; and she had never guessed it—never once. God forgive her ! Nature has strange revenges, and one of the strangest was that now, in her solitude and his dishonour, the pathos of his past agony should have touched the heart of Ermytrude to closer and more complete sympathy with him

than either the impassioned love-making of his courting-days or the devotion of his married life.

One day she was struck more forcibly than ever with this painful fact of his constant suffering. It was when she came across the proof of a photograph which they had had taken together in Naples. She had disliked it at the time, and declined to have any more, although she did not then understand the meaning of the feeling of repulsion it had conveyed to her. Now she knew! He was looking down at her, and the expression on his face—it was a good likeness—struck her like a blow; it was so made up of love, longing, fear, and something not unlike despair.

She was standing by the cabinet in the library where he kept his private papers when she found it, and, with a gasp of mingled horror and remorse, she let it drop to the floor. Then, stooping to pick it up, she sank down on her knees and broke out into a passion of weeping.

‘ Oh, what a wretch I was never to see— never to know!’ she sobbed out in bitter anguish. ‘ You feared me—*feared* me—and I drove you to your death! Forgive me, dearest, only forgive me! I would not have been so hard—I did not know. But if I had been a true wife I should have known; and now—ah me! now it is too late—too late!’

The tears saved her reason, probably, but the agony seared her heart. Henceforth she must bear about with her the knowledge that she had in great part to answer for that rash, irrevocable deed of her husband. From that moment she became a humbler, perchance a sweeter woman—full of sympathy with the sinning and the suffering portion of the world; less severe upon human error and human failure; less confident in the consciousness of her own infallibility.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A SUPPRESSED INQUEST.

EVEN Mr. Wilbraham Tweed's large appetite for sensation was almost satiated by the events which followed on the death of the Marquis of Carabas.

There was, first of all, the scandal which arose out of the inquest. A coroner's inquiry had of course been inevitable, but it was, by some means or other, kept secret. Not a line had appeared in any of the newspapers. The death of the Marquis was an ordinary, if unexpected and surprising event.

‘It was unfortunate,’ remarked the chief newspaper of his party, ‘that he should have died before obtaining an opportunity of con-

tradicting the extraordinary statements just made before the Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords. No doubt those statements, which the public had too eagerly accepted, and which rested merely upon the unsupported word of an unknown citizen of the United States—everybody knew what sort of stories came from America—had hastened his lamented end. Those to whom the Marquis of Carabas was known would not have a moment's hesitation in exonerating him from any participation in such concealments as were alleged to have taken place, even assuming that there had been such concealments, a thing at present extremely doubtful. The Marquis of Carabas was the soul of honour and truth. There was no manlier man in the House of Lords. To have been held up before the world, even for a day, as a person who had been guilty of dishonourable conduct, had doubtless occasioned such a shock as, acting upon a system already disordered by almost in-

cessant work in the service of his country, had resulted in his [most unexpected and much-to-be-lamented death.]

Further words of eulogy followed, such as are common to these occasions, but such as were in this instance more than usually well deserved; for the Marquis of Carabas had unquestionably been a most competent and hard-working statesman, to whom, it was generally assumed, the highest office in the service of the State would ultimately fall.

But though nothing was said in any of the journals as to the manner of the Marquis's death, there was an uneasy suspicion in the public mind that it had not come about in the natural way. It remained, however, for Mr. Wilbraham Tweed to ferret out the actual facts of the case.

Mr. Tweed was absent on one of his Continental missions when the death of the Marquis took place. He had been endeavouring to interview the King of Portugal as to the probability of that monarch's

abdication. The enterprise had been rewarded with no very gratifying success, and Mr. Tweed came back with a feeling that something must at once be done with a view of restoring his disturbed sense of *amour propre*.

During these frequent absences of his each day's newspapers were arranged in orderly piles on one of the tables of his room. It was his habit to go through the whole immediately on his return, so as at once to resume the thread of his interrupted observation of events. He could 'tear the guts' out of a number of newspapers with more rapidity than any other man breathing, he believed and said.

On the day of his return from Portugal he purchased a copy of his own newspaper at Euston, and there, in leaded type, and with displayed headings, he read an account of the funeral of the Marquis of Carabas.

The Marquis dead? Here was a surprising thing indeed! Of what, then, could the

Marquis have died? just, too, when his case was before the Committee of Privileges.

Mr. Wilbraham Tweed 'tore the guts' out of his newspapers with much more expedition than usual that night. He made straight for everything that bore upon the Marquis of Carabas. The eulogy he passed over as unworthy of his notice. He wanted facts, nothing but facts, and the facts were surprisingly few. When it seemed there was no more to be learned he leaned back in his chair, and gave utterance in a slow, elongated way to a single word :

'Squared!'

There was an electric bell close to his hand, and he pressed it three times with his finger, whereupon a porter appeared.

'All the reporters gone home, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir.'

'That's a nuisance,' said Mr. Tweed; then, considering a moment, he went on: 'Well, let Mr. Mellingham have this note as soon as he shows his face in the morning. Now

get me a cab ;' and Mr. Wilbraham Tweed, looking weary, as he well might, considering all he had got through since he last slept, was soon bowling along homeward, with his eyes closed, but with certain speculations as to the death of the Marquis of Carabas still revolving in his head.

He was in his office again at nine o'clock on the following morning. Mr. Mellingham reported himself an hour and a half later.

' You have been to the coroner's office ?' asked Mr. Tweed.

' Yes.'

' Well ?'

' There has been no inquest on the Marquis of Carabas. Indeed, there has been a surprising dearth of inquests in that district for some time past. The only one recorded for the last week is on a man named Shelburne.'

Mr. Tweed was a severe, even a pious man ; but he sprang to his feet with some-

thing that sounded like a word that pious men should not use.

‘ Well, of all the blockheads ! Shelburne ! Surely you must know that Shelburne is the name of the Marquis of Carabas ? Go back as fast as you can drive, and ask for a sight of the depositions.’

Mr. Mellingham, conscious of a sad falling away from his usual acuteness, lost no time in leaving the presence of his chief, to return shortly after with further disappointing news. The depositions could not be seen.

‘ Who says so ?’ asked Mr. Tweed, with such a quickness of utterance as ran the three words into one.

‘ The coroner’s officer says he has orders not to show the depositions without the coroner’s express authority.’

‘ Squared !’ said Mr. Tweed, and he signified with a wave of the hand that Mr. Mellingham might leave the room.

Only an hour remained before the usual time for the production of the paper. The

editor of the *Drury Lane Review* at once began to write very rapidly, in a large hand, so that he had speedily covered a number of sheets of paper. Then he touched his bell twice, and the foreman compositor appeared.

‘Centre column, clock page; display!’ said Mr. Tweed; and the foreman bustled out of the room without a word. He guessed from the editor’s manner that what he held in his hand was a new sensation.

Mr. Tweed paced about his room for a while, with his long thin hands behind him, nervously pulling and twitching, as if they were striving to express their gratification to each other.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘that will do. Yes, decidedly it will do.’

When he went out to lunch a little later the newsboys were loudly calling out:

‘*Review*: Marquis of Carabas—Supposed Suicide!’

This latter was a newsboy’s version. ‘Can it have been suicide?’ was the way in which

Mr. Tweed had put it in one of his numerous displayed headlines. He asserted nothing, but only inquired.

There was, however, no doubt in his own mind. The Marquis had been unable to bear the shame of an exposure. He had put an end to his life in some way as yet unknown, and then it had been arranged to hold an inquest in such a manner as would not attract public attention.

But how had the affair been kept from the press, seeing that the reporters attend all inquests ?

That circumstance was easily accounted for. The newspapers do not despatch their own reporters on business of this description. They trust to the large class known as 'liners.' The 'liner' is a free-lance. He sends in his copy to the various newspaper offices. It may be accepted or not. Should it be accepted it is paid for at the rate of three-halfpence or twopence the line.

The amount to be obtained out of an

inquest, even of an unusual character, could never be very large. The amount to be obtained by suppression of such matter might, on occasion, be considerable.

The moment Mr. Tweed guessed that an inquest had been held he also surmised that the liners had been induced to keep the fact from the newspapers; and he now hinted his suspicion in print, making no doubt that in the course of a few hours he would be able to acquaint himself with all particulars.

He did not lunch in any of the clubs. He liked to be talked about, but did not care to be personally known. His favourite resort at mid-day was a quiet, somewhat squalid eating-house in Long Acre, where his thin figure was sufficiently familiar, but had never been identified with the editor of the *Drury Lane Review*.

Amongst the few *habitués* present he noticed that there was a more than usual animation this particular day. They were commonly a silent set, but now Mr. Tweed's

newspaper was passing round from hand to hand, with various kinds of comments thereon.

‘The heather is on fire,’ said Mr. Tweed to himself, as he sat down in his favourite dark corner and looked about him in a furtive way. Had he listened, he might have heard many unflattering things about himself, and some flattering ones, too ; for public opinion on the editor of the *Drury Lane Review* varied between two extremes. But he was not a listener at any time, unless where there was hope of obtaining news ; and to-day, as he took his modest lunch, he was revolving further plans in his head concerning the affairs of the Marquis of Carabas.

‘A whole history of the affair and the people, in chapters, with portraits. Yes ; I think that will take. The public likes shilling thrillers. This shall be a shilling thriller published in instalments, with this difference—that all the incidents shall be true.’

In this manner Mr. Tweed formulated his scheme, as he washed down his lunch with sips of indifferent water.

When he had finished, he started up with a jerk. He was lively all over once more.

‘Yes,’ he thought, as he passed downstairs ; ‘and we will soon have those fellows out of gaol, too.’

CHAPTER XLVII.

AN UNSOUGHT HONOUR.

IT so happened that Mr. Marc Aurelius Tidd and Mr. Tweed had determined on the same enterprise.

The former had been unwontedly moved and incensed by certain things said in the newspapers on the subject of the Marquis's death.

‘Well, I’m d——d!’ he said, quite fervently, as he sat reading the *Times* at the breakfast-table.

Celia looked towards him with an expression of surprise.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, ‘but I’ll be jiggered!’ and he continued to read with a

rapidly mounting colour. At length he threw the newspaper to the ground.

‘Well, I *will* be ——’ he was proceeding, when his sister brought him to order by ringing a spoon on the side of a coffee-cup.

‘What is it, Marc, you naughty fellow?’ she asked. ‘Why are you repeating such language?’

‘Fact is, Celia, I was forgetting. I beg your pardon again, I am sure,’ saying which he proceeded with his breakfast at a great pace, with a look of determined and very unusual anger upon his features.

Celia waited until the meal was over. Then, pointing to her brother’s favourite chair, she said :

‘Sit down there, Marc, and tell me what it is all about.’

She threw herself on the rug beside him, and rested her beautiful head on his knees.

‘Tell me what it is at once,’ she repeated.

‘Tell you about what?’

‘About what you found in that newspaper.’

‘Why not read the newspaper for yourself? They’ve got on the right line to rile me, that’s all! Didn’t think I had so much temper left in me, eh?’

‘It must be very bad to vex you so, dear Marc. I want to hear about it from you. It’ll do you good to tell me, I’m sure.’

‘Suggests that I’m an American, that’s all, and that all Americans are liars. Thinks the late Marquis of Carabas a saint, and that I was playing it off on him; for my own special fun and edification, I reckon. Because they can’t find any worse reason.’

‘And what shall you do, Marc?’

‘Do? What *can* a fellow do when the d—— hem! newspapers choose to slander him? I reckon I must grin and bear it.’

‘And is there nothing else to be done?’

‘That’s just what I was wondering. They’ve roused me in earnest this time. I must find the true Marquis of Carabas, some-

how, if there is one. I ought to have done it long ago. I reckon it's that young fellow in gaol. I shall get him out if I can.'

At a meeting held the day after the Marquis's death, the Committee of Privileges had adjourned *sine die*, which probably meant to the Greek Kalends, Marc had said. Nothing was likely to be done for Bertie Shelburne, therefore, unless his case was taken up from some new point of view.

'I must get at all the facts of those Socialist trials, and see if I can't work the Home Secretary. When the young fellow is out I will soon take steps to prove whether I am an American liar or not. What do you think, Celia?'

'I think you should do as you say.'

'That Lord Cranbery of yours might come in useful there. He might help to work the Home Secretary, too. Will you sound him upon that subject, Celia? I shouldn't wonder but he might be very useful indeed, now.'

Celia hesitated. She saw several objections to this course.

‘I shouldn’t like to ask him about anything of that kind,’ she said. ‘You see, he is a kind of relation to the Carabas people. He is the Marchioness’s cousin, in fact. They would think I was urging him on out of pique, because the Duchess declines to be civil.’

‘I forgot,’ said Marc. ‘Well, I must do without him, then. I can do more business with a lawyer or two, I dare say. But, anyhow, the thing’s got to be carried through.’

This was done all the more easily by reason of the appearance of the successive instalments of Mr. Tweed’s thrilling story. Undoubtedly, the editor of the *Drury Lane Review* had got up his case with great completeness and consummate skill. He set forth the whole history of the Deans, of Lord Bexley, of that nobleman’s death as told by Mr. Tidd. There was a facsimile of the ‘marriage lines’ of Adelbert Shelburne and

Elizabeth Dean. Mr. Tweed seemed to establish the identity of this Adelbert Shelburne beyond a shadow of doubt.

Then followed an account of the Hyde Park demonstration, and of the part which Jacob Dean and Bertie Shelburne had played therein. Reviewed by Mr. Tweed's ingenious pen, the evidence on which the convictions had been secured seemed almost as poor as it could possibly be, whilst the evidence on the other side appeared to be absolutely conclusive as to the fact that the two prisoners whose names had most been in men's mouths had been active only in attempting to prevent disorder.

‘Had the trials taken place at a time of less excitement and public apprehension,’ said the *Drury Lane Review*, ‘a conviction on such evidence must have been impossible—nay, there must have been an honourable and triumphant acquittal.

‘What, then, is the duty of the Home Secretary? We defy him to come, after

honest consideration of the facts, to any other conclusions than those at which we have ourselves arrived. These are, first, that Adelbert Shelburne is now the Marquis of Carabas; and, second, that Jacob Dean and Adelbert Shelburne are most wrongfully and cruelly imprisoned.

‘We ask for no consideration,’ Mr. Tweed went on to say, ‘on the ground that young Shelburne belongs to all but the highest rank in the nobility. We should be the first to proclaim that no consideration of that kind ought to influence the Home Secretary in the performance of his duty. We say that the Queen’s pardon ought to be extended to these two unfortunate men because they are innocent of the charges on which they were condemned. We have set forth the facts as they really are and were. We demand that Jacob Dean and Adelbert Shelburne shall be released, and we pledge our word that the nation will shortly demand it too.’

Mr. Tidd had so powerful an auxiliary in

this 'new journalist' that he was really left with nothing to do. The case of the two prisoners was taken up by the people, as Mr. Tweed had known must be the case. Mass meetings were held in various parts of the Metropolis. The withholding of a peerage from Bertie Shelburne was somehow made to appear as one of the wrongs of the poor.

A Cabinet meeting was eventually called to consider the subject. Several elections had recently gone against the Government; two other elections were pending, one of them in London, and it was necessary to do something popular. It seemed just now as if nothing could be much more popular than the release of the two Socialists.

'Give them Barabbas!' exclaimed a cynical member of the Cabinet.

'I hope you will not speak in that way, Burtisham,' said the Prime Minister. 'We are not merely considering whether we shall do something to please the mob. I really think these two men would not be convicted

if they were to be tried over again, now that the panic is over. As for the younger Barabbas, as I suppose you would call him, I am not clear that he is not entitled to sit in the House of Lords.'

The upshot of it all was that the Queen's pardon was issued to Jacob Dean and Bertie Shelburne. The news of the fact got bruited abroad almost immediately that this step was decided upon. The candidate who was standing on the Government side for the London vacancy was able to make a definite announcement on the subject at one of his meetings. A great demonstration was at once organized. When the two prisoners issued from confinement they were to be carried through London in triumph; but the Home Secretary had anticipated something of this description, and had resolved that it should not be.

Bertie Shelburne and his uncle were liberated in the early morning, when nobody was as yet astir. They drew in a long in-

spiration of the free, fresh air, glanced back at the prison-walls, took each other by the hand as children do, and marched off at once in the direction of Peppermint Hill.

When the processionists arrived outside the prison-gates they were informed that they had come a couple of hours too late. There was a roar of disappointment. A stout, well-appointed gentleman was perceived to be taking notes. The word went round that he was Mr. Wilbraham Tweed, of the *Drury Lane Review*. Mr. Tweed's name was in everyone's mouth, and yet, strange to say, few people knew him by sight; therefore the mistake was not wonderful.

There was a benevolent, self-satisfied expression upon this gentleman's face, that proclaimed the champion of the wronged. He beamed upon the crowd through his tinted glasses in a manner that impressed and delighted it.

The real facts of the case were that he was a hard-working and badly-paid artist,

belonging to the staff of a weekly illustrated paper, and the types of heads assembled there amused and interested him. Little did he guess, however, to what high and giddy eminence his pleasant looks were destined to call him.

‘Three cheers for Mr. Tweed, lads!’ cried one of the foremost of the mob; and to this challenge they all heartily responded.

Still the gentleman smiled, and looked pleased, and continued to scribble in his notebook.

‘Since we’ve been cheated out of the other two, let’s carry *him* home in triumph,’ was the next suggestion; and before he could quite grasp the meaning of the situation the poor inoffensive, frightened artist was hoisted shoulder-high and borne away with shouts and tumult by a surging, rejoicing, somewhat ill-smelling mob.

‘Here, stop this, let me down! Who do you take me for—or what have I done? It’s all a mistake, I tell you! You’re a lot of

obstinate, good-for-nothing, hot-headed fools !
Let me down, I say—let me do—own !

But it was all to no purpose. His cries were drowned in a chorus of cheers and yells of triumph ; and his flourishes of a stout, gampish umbrella were taken as demonstrations of delight. He was too modest—this champion of theirs—that was his only fault.

And Mr. Wilbraham Tweed smiled a sardonic smile, following the crowd unrecognised, and quite content that to another should fall the disagreeable honours that had been intended for himself.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

OUT OF THE PRISON DOORS.

JACOB DEAN and his nephew Bertie Shelburne went home together from the prison gate in a mood of pleased sadness. The cage door was opened indeed, but the wings of the released birds were weighted with sorrow. They spoke little; they exchanged no confidences; in each the joyous sense of liberty regained was almost overpowered by the burden of thought.

Jacob, the would-be regenerator of the world, felt that his universe lay shattered to ruins around him. His imprisonment and the events preceding it had between them destroyed his belief in himself and in his system. It was as though the solid, material

earth had floated away from under his feet, as though he had been left helpless and solitary in the midst of space, with nothing to stand upon, and nothing upon which to lay a steady hand.

Bertie, for his part, was half bewildered by consideration of the past and the future. He had by this time learned all about his origin, and of the gorgeous possibilities that lay ahead, and his mind was hardening itself to a great renunciation.

So these two men walked on, with only an occasional break in the silence that oppressed them, in the direction of Peppermint Hill. They might have taken train for most of the distance—they might have caught an omnibus; but, without explaining to themselves or each other why it should be so, they had both an unconscious craving towards exercise, and so trudged on, glum and thoughtful, and as though they were old friends who had fallen out by the way, but not so violently as to drive them asunder.

It was a happy but a quiet home-coming. Bessie paid her usual tribute of tears, mingled with low, crooning, caressing words, sobbed out on her big lad's breast, as she clung to and fondled him in her soft, foolish, tender fashion. Nelly, unable as yet to rise from her sofa, beamed on them from her large luminous eyes ; but her love and her joy did not seem to require the outlet of words—were, indeed, too deep for any words to express.

Once, Jacob paused in something which he was describing, some incident of his imprisonment, and cast a quick, wondering look around, as though he missed suddenly some sympathizing presence. He got as far as, 'Why, where's our——' and then it all rushed back upon him like a flood. It was so natural and pleasant to be at home again that, for the moment, he had forgotten the sad fact that the shadow of death rested upon the household.

Bessie's apron rose to her eyes at once.

'Ay, Jacob, you miss *him* from among us ?'

she whimpered. 'It's queer how little store one set on him while he was here every day, and now—now there seems nobody about the place, and it's lonesome—dreadfully lonesome !'

Jacob said nothing, but the shadow pressed upon him with an overpowering weight. The thought of that patient, simple, loving and lovable soul that had gone out from amongst them gave the strong man a keen pang of anguish. He felt himself to blame in some measure for that innocent sacrifice. It was in his cause that Joshua had met with such a cruel death. He—Jacob—had given to it his heart, his strength, his ambition; but Joshua had done more—far more. *He* had laid down his life for it !

Meantime the little household—for they unanimously resolved that separate dwellings were no longer necessary—was assuming quite an important aspect, and attracting attention from many different points. Marc Aurelius Tidd, for example, had at length

determined to seek it out, and, unfolding his large map of London for the purpose, discovered it after some difficulty.

Mr. Tidd had, it must be admitted, exhibited more knowledge of the slow processes of law in a monarchical State than could fairly have been expected in an American when he gave so liberal and cynical an interpretation to the announcement that the Committee of Privileges had adjourned *sine die*.

The members of that Committee appeared to have no intention of ever meeting again. Months passed. Celia Tidd and Lord Cranberry were made one, much to the chagrin of the Duchess of Dundridge and her kind, who looked upon Marc Aurelius as a dangerous republican who had come over from America for the express purpose of foisting an impostor upon the House of Lords.

That gentleman was dimly conscious of a hostile atmosphere; but as he never went into society it did not affect his peace of

mind. He was grimly determined to do his duty, and to keep the engagement he had made with himself. The one thing that bothered him was that the 'wander hunger' was on him, and he would fain have packed up his portmanteau and fled from civilization. Nevertheless, he stayed in England and in London, hateful though it was. He would see this out, and then——

When Lord Cranbery and Celia had gone abroad for their honeymooning, the American felt that the time had come to force the hand of the enemy, as he phrased it.

Besides himself and Mr. Wilbraham Tweed there was no one who seemed actively interested in the matter. The editor of the *Drury Lane Review* would not allow the Carabas peerage case to drop, because there were still great journalistic possibilities in it.

'It would be very pleasant,' said Mr. Tweed, 'to have a Marquis of one's own making.'

The worst of it was that the Marquis did not appear at all inclined to be made. He

would not assist in or countenance any of the plans that were designed for his benefit. The door of the little house in Magnolia Street was shut in the face of all inquirers.

When they were released from prison, Jacob Dean and Bertie Shelburne had gone back to their work—so soon, that is to say, as they found work to do. They entered into no explanations, seeming to understand each other without anything of the kind. Jacob kept himself sedulously aloof from all agitations. It was not that prison had conquered him. He retained all his former aspirations after the good of the people, but scarcely any of his former hopes. There was something wrong about the means by which he, and others like him, had gone about the regeneration of the world. There must be other ways of moving the hearts of men than Hyde Park demonstrations and Socialist riots. But those ways were as yet dark to him. So he went quietly to work again, intending to think things out and begin afresh.

Of the Carabas peerage he said nothing, after Bertie had once spoken out on the subject. What Bertie said—it was his mother who had provoked him to speech—was this :

‘ I suppose it is all as you say ! Perhaps it is true that I might be Marquis of Carabas, if I chose. All the same, I am going back to the bench. Of course, it will be uncomfortable for me just at first. There will be curiosity and talk and chaff, and all that sort of thing ; but after the nine days of wonder it will all pass away. After the fellows have set me down for an impostor they’ll begin to take to me again, and we’ll get along very well. Yes, yes, mother, I know it would be very jolly to be rich and great—jolly for some men, that is—but I am not sure that it would be jolly for me. I am quite content here, at Peppermint Hill, with you, mother, and you, Nelly, and you, Uncle Jacob ! If that great position really belongs to and is thrust upon me, of course I shall not be a coward and run away from it.

That would be stupid and wrong, because there must be duties to discharge; but I shall certainly not seek it, and I shall not be unhappy if it never comes.'

Bessie cried a good deal in a silent, secret way over the decision of her incomprehensible son. She had built a great many castles in the air on Bertie's behalf since she had found out the secret of his birth, and it was a trouble to her to find them tumbling about her ears. For herself she had no ambition, and had been almost relieved when she found the extent of the grandeur she had just missed. But for her handsome, clever boy there was nothing too great; and she did not appreciate his scruples. Nelly understood him better. She was sitting by his side when he spoke, and bent her head, and kissed his toil-rough hand without a word.

Mr. Tidd, having found out the obscure locality of Peppermint Hill, went thither, urged by his uneasy sense of duty.

Though he was known there only by name,

it was clear to the inmates of the house that the door must not be shut in *his* face. Bessie, indeed, had cherished a secret longing concerning him. He was the man who had brought the news of her scapegrace husband's death. How could it be but that she should not desire to look upon his face, and hear what he had to say?

She thought it fortunate that Jacob and Bertie were still at their work, and that Nelly was upstairs, so that the interview should be a *tête-à-tête* one.

Mr. Tidd was greatly puzzled by Bessie. A woman like this was strange to him. Any confidence, and, indeed, any coming to what he called business, seemed impossible to her. Bessie did not help him in the least. She whimpered a little when he spoke rather harshly of her husband, and failed to see what a wronged creature she had been. She knew no more of Alaska than of a landscape in the moon, and yet her thoughts persisted in travelling thither. Now and

then she asked some timid, simple question, and the American—wishing devoutly that he had a man to deal with rather than this tender, irrational little woman, who moved him to pity, even while she provoked his anger by her foolishness — shuffling uneasily upon his chair, answered her as best he might.

It was not until he came to think over the interview that Marc Aurelius realized how completely the simple, hesitating questions of this little woman whom he pitied had drawn from him all his knowledge of the last moments of the unworthy husband who had deserted her so long ago.

Jacob and Bertie came home in due course, and more awkwardness ensued. Mr. Tidd was beginning to feel an uneasy consciousness of too much interference in the affairs of other people, and this feeling was certainly reciprocated. An exchange of glances showed him this. But he was not a man to be defeated by any weak feelings of his own, and

he had promised himself to see this business through.

‘You are sort of surprised to see me here,’ he said, in his quiet, drawling way. ‘Don’t trouble to contradict for the sake of being polite. I’ll take all that for granted. But, look here ! I’m not going to fool round, and take up your time for nothing. And I’ll tell you what,’ he went on, with an increasing drawl and a shrug of the shoulders : ‘it wasn’t for my pleasure I came ; and, indeed, I don’t quite know why it was, myself ! Might have written, and saved us all, you know.’

The laugh with which he ended this speech—obviously against himself—put both Mr. Tidd and his auditors more at ease.

‘I should like to know, now that I am here,’ he said, turning to Bertie, ‘whether you have heard anything of the Committee of Privileges lately ?’

‘I have not,’ was the reply. ‘I don’t want to know anything about it. I have connected

no hopes with it, one way or another. I am a working man, and a working man I mean to remain.'

Bessie cast a sad, reproachful glance at him, but he either did not or would not perceive it.

'Very fine sentiments, young man,' said the American slowly; 'tolerably noble sentiments! Dare say I'd feel the same myself—just at the first idea of the thing. We don't lay too much stress on the aristocracy across the water, though your newspaper men do their best to make us out snobs and toadies. But I don't see that it's a matter for personal decision. If you've been born a Marquis you can't escape from your birthright. If the Committee of Privileges decides—and I sometimes wonder whether it will ever make up its mind on the subject—that you *are* Marquis of Carabas, you will be Marquis just as much here at Peppermint Hill as if you took your proper place in the House of Lords.'

This was a new light for Bertie. A bewildered expression crept over his face. His mother, on the contrary, beamed with delight. He was a sensible man, this American, she thought. Of course Bertie was a Marquis, let him say what he liked !

‘Surely the proceedings will not be continued if I decline to take part in them?’ Bertie asked wonderingly.

‘That’s where you are mistaken,’ answered Marc Aurelius ; ‘they just will ! You haven’t got any personal choice, I tell you ! There are others quite determined upon seeing the matter through. I’m one !’

‘And pray what affair is it of yours?’ broke out Jacob Dean, somewhat rudely. He was brimming over with fury at the cool assurance of this confounded Yankee, who dared to come to an Englishman’s castle and interfere in his private affairs. Mr. Tidd turned and surveyed him with a calm and placid gaze, which somewhat disconcerted the fiery and masterful workman.

‘Some folks might be offended at the way you put that question, my friend,’ said Mr. Tidd quietly; ‘but I’m a cool customer—generally! Besides, I do feel as though I were interfering—a sort of Paul Pry person, you know. But I have my reasons; and, what’s more, they are good ones. In the first place, what I call a duty to this young fellow’s father. In the next, my own reputation. I don’t mean to allow your British aristocracy to make me out a liar. There! will that satisfy you?’

Bertie and Jacob saw things more clearly, at least. The man certainly had no selfish object in pushing the matter—no end of his own to serve, save the one he had mentioned, namely, that of clearing his own name from the stigma of falsehood. Better relations gradually established themselves between them, and when Mr. Tidd, on departure, asked Bertie to accompany him to the railway-station, the lad did so right willingly,

certain by this time that the man was his friend.

‘Don’t you be a fool, young man,’ said the American solemnly; ‘don’t you flout good fortune when it comes! It mayn’t be altogether pleasant at first, I dare say. I shouldn’t fancy the position of Marquis myself. I believe I’d run off to the interior of Africa to escape the honour. But that’s because I’m a republican, and can’t cotton to your system. Now, with you it’s different! It won’t come natural just at first, but you’ll soon get used to it. And then—think of what you can do! Think of the possibilities of helping the world that such a position gives you. You are young, and enthusiastic, and full of sympathy with the wrongs of humanity. Now, I put it to you fairly: wouldn’t you be of more use to those you are anxious to assist if you had money and power and position to back you up, than if you remained a poor struggling worker, hardly able to earn sufficient to keep the

wolf from your own door, and with nothing to spare for the necessities of others? You are clever and ambitious, in the best sense; then just you gladly take the chance of using your talents, and, what men of talent don't often have, your intimate knowledge of the people, to their greatest advantage. But here's the Junction, and I dare say you are tired of my preaching, and so—good-night!'

CHAPTER XLIX.

IMPROVING THE WORLD.

THE words of the American raised a new ambition in Bertie Shelburne's heart and gave a fresh direction to his energies. He now talked freely of these to his uncle Jacob, whom he, to some extent, dazzled and carried away by the splendour of his plans.

And here was a new outlet for Jacob's mind and restless vitality also.

To raise the world ?

They had tried it already ; but, then, that was without means, and evidently in the wrong way. What might not be accomplished by the aid of the income of a Marquis of Carabas — of a Marquis who

meant to live meanly in order to arrive at noble ends; who knew intimately the real lives of the poor, and how they could best be helped—of a Marquis with whom the enthusiasm of humanity had ever been a controlling passion?

‘If only the ship comes in!’ Bertie would cry.

He had reached the opposite extreme, and was now ardently desirous of what he had formerly renounced.

And the ship did come in. The case for Bertie was so clear that the Committee of Privileges—reluctant as it might be—found itself with no choice but to pronounce the young engineer to be Marquis of Carabas.

Mr. Wilbraham Tweed sang a loud pæan of rejoicing and of self-applause. He looked at this result as something solely of his own production. He had resolved to make a Marquis of Carabas, and, behold, the thing was done! People must therefore be prepared to give three cheers, and one cheer

more for Mr. Wilbraham Tweed and the *Drury Lane Review*.

But now that the fact was accomplished, and the Marquis made, what was to be done with him? Mr. Tweed felt as though his responsibilities were only commencing. Frankenstein grew afraid of his monster so soon as the creature could speak and move, and fled from the terror of his own creation.

But Mr. Tweed was no mere Frankenstein. Far be it from him to feel any terror. He was conscious instead of a supreme pride and satisfaction. He quite meant to manage *his* monster in his own way. The one man who might have disputed his right had left the field. As soon as Mr. Tidd became acquainted with the decision of the House of Lords Committee, he set to work to pack his belongings, and within two days had started upon his travels. Mr. Tweed was not sorry to hear this. It removed all fear of rivalry.

‘Ah,’ thought the busy man gleefully,

‘the management of an English nobleman will furnish pleasant interludes between the management of empires!’

If his anticipations as to the exercise of this form of power were not realized—and they certainly were not—he found ample compensation in the plans which the new Marquis had himself formed.

Mr. Tweed had a genuine enthusiasm in the cause of social regeneration. He was as anxious to ‘lift the masses’ as a man so incessantly occupied could be. When he learned from Bertie what those plans were, he saw at once two great possibilities. Why, this was better than ever! Here was a journalistic sensation of the first quality; here, also, was such a means of helping the people as had never presented itself before since the beginning of things! One of the richest noblemen in the kingdom turned practical philanthropist, determined to devote his income to a great social experiment—what magnificent copy! Also, what an ex-

ceptional opportunity of helping forward a great movement!

Sensation came first, of course. Mr. Tweed made the plans of the new Marquis public through the *Drury Lane Review*. The working-man noble was decidedly a credit to the class which had produced him. He intended to live as a poor man amongst poor men. He and his uncle, Jacob Dean—of whom so much had been said—meant to become Socialists on a new basis. A vast income would be expended in a glorious, if quixotic, attempt to found a new heaven and a new earth. And so on!

These announcements created immense astonishment among two very opposite and disproportionate sections of society. In those high circles to which he might now be said to belong, the new Marquis was regarded as a quite hopeless person. His low breeding was obviously displaying itself. What is bred in the bone would—— But the proverb is somewhat musty! His generous

treatment of the widow of the man who had usurped his position made talk enough, indeed; but even this talk was scarcely to his advantage. He was cut off as a dead branch. Related to half the nobility, nobody sought him out or would acknowledge him—at least, during the first six months of his accession to the Marquisate.

To this, however, there was one striking exception. Lord Cranbery welcomed the young reformer with open arms, and at once became a partner in all his schemes for social regeneration. A partnership this which had the most important effect upon Bertie's after-life, since it brought him into constant association with Lord Cranbery's cousin, Lady Nora Challoner, who was also smitten at this time with the philanthropic craze.

It had not been found possible for the Dundridge family to keep on antagonistic terms with Lady Cranbery—late Celia Tidd—the American heiress. Not that Lady Nora had ever maintained any antagonistic

attitude towards her. She was too sincerely and frankly grateful to the girl who had prevented her marriage with Cran. Besides this, she had fallen in love with Celia herself, at first sight, when they had met. It was at an evening reception at the house of the American Minister, and the bride was simply radiant with beauty and diamonds. Lady Nora decided that she had never seen such a brilliant creature—and then she wondered, with the kindly contempt of a near relation, how it was that so much splendour should have fallen to the share of the ‘poor Cran’ they had all snubbed, and liked, and laughed at.

Lady Cranbery, on her side, thought the girl charming, and recognised that she might have proved a dangerous rival, had she cared to compete for the matrimonial prize.

It was not long before the two were on the very best of terms, laughing and chatting as though they had known each other for years. Luckily for Lady Nora, she was not

chaperoned by her august mamma that evening, for that lady had not as yet condescended to call upon her new relative.

‘It is *so* funny to see you in the character of a Benedict, Cran!’ said the girl laughingly, as Lord Cranbery hovered round in a state of sublime idiocy, unable to withdraw from the vicinity of his bride; ‘but, do you know, I think it suits you—rather! Certainly you have done him good, Celia—if you will allow me a cousinly privilege—he doesn’t prose a bit; at least, I haven’t heard him do so as yet.’

‘Nora, you are incorrigible!’ exclaimed her cousin, with a touch of annoyance in his voice; ‘you will alarm Celia about her future if you give me such a character.’

‘What did he prose about, dear? You ought to warn me, I think.’

Lady Nora looked saucy.

‘Well, now I come to recollect, I believe it was principally about *you*. And you know that was rather hard lines—considering

everything. First, to jilt me for you—now don't contradict, Cran, because you know that it's perfectly true, every word of it—and then to bore me to death, day in, day out, with a recital of your manifold charms and perfections. Upon my life, I think that I was a very much ill-used young person. I wonder that I survived it all !

Lady Cranbery laughed in turn.

‘ You must forgive him, Nora dear.’

‘ And you, too, for taking him away from me ? Well, strange as it may appear, I don't bear malice ; and really, since I have seen you, I can find some excuse for his shameful behaviour. There ! isn't that a pretty speech to come from a blighted being ?’

Since the world of fashion had taken to raving about Lady Cranbery—her beauty, her wit, her fascination, her wonderful gowns, her still more wonderful jewels—the Duchess at length bethought her of her duty to the family, and did ‘ the civil thing ’ by Celia.

So it came to pass that Lady Nora and Lady Cranbery became inseparable companions, and that this companionship necessitated another one, referred to in a previous paragraph.

No word concerning the past was ever exchanged between Lady Nora Challoner and the Marquis of Carabas, but they met with something of the feeling of old friends, and never without a thrill of the heart. For it is certain that Heaven had made these two for each other.

They talked quite gravely, when they met, of the great scheme, never of what each was beginning to think of as a guilty secret.

Lady Nora was one of the 'workers' in the new system of social regeneration, much to her mother's horror. But the Duke thought that his little girl could do no wrong, and took her part through thick and thin, thus ensuring her an amount of liberty of action that would otherwise have been

impossible. The Duke had developed a way of 'putting his foot down' since the battle-royal anent Lord Cranbery, from which he had come off with flying colours.

'Let Nora have her way,' he said, whenever appealed to; 'she's got more sense in her little finger than most of us have in our whole bodies. She wants work, and she wants to do something for other people. Let her try, at any rate, and it will make her happier.'

This little army of social regenerators were all under the command of Jacob Dean, who was a splendid organizer, if a stern task-master.

One day Lady Nora gave a deep, long-drawn sigh. They had been toiling all day, and it was growing dusk.

'I am afraid you find this work too heavy for you?' said Bertie anxiously.

'No, no—not that,' replied Lady Nora, in haste; 'but I was wondering what it would lead to, that's all.'

‘Not quite all,’ put in Lady Cranbery. They were all together, in the offices which were the centre of the great web they were weaving. ‘Just a little more than that, Nora dear! You were feeling what we all feel, that the problem is too big for us, after all, and that human nature and human selfishness are a little too powerful to contend with. Isn’t that so?’

Lady Nora sighed again, but followed the sigh with a shrug of the shoulders and the old merry laugh.

‘Which means that you will not confess to a feeling of failure?’ said Lord Cranbery, who knew her moods. ‘And you are right, little girl! We will never give in, however small our results may appear to be. It is foolish to expect too much; that is a fact I learned long since. Consider how old the world is, and how many persons must have felt just as eager as ourselves to do it good, and how very, very poorly they have succeeded; and how there is always the need

for workers, even though the workers should appear to fail.'

'That's just how it is,' said Jacob Dean; 'we must go on doing something. We shall not always see the results, but they'll be there, all the same. If we are not satisfied, it is because we've hoped for too much. I am disappointed, but yet I am proud of what has been done. It is less than we aimed at—ever so much less—but, still, it is better than anything that has been done before!'

'Oh, please don't make it seem as though we were falling away!' cried Lady Nora, clasping her hands in vehement entreaty; 'I am quite sure that I am not. More than that, I am quite sure that I never shall. Only the world that we poor pigmies are trying to lift is so very, very heavy, don't you know, and one may be pardoned for getting out of breath, and consequently sighing, sometimes.'

Bertie listened in silence, and with drooping head. Was he disappointed, then? Not

that, exactly ; but he did feel that they had attempted things too hard of accomplishment. They had expected to do in a few months what it would take generations to accomplish. His newly-acquired wealth, extensive as it might be, was but as a drop in the well.

‘I think our plans are right,’ he said at length, ‘and, at any rate, we haven’t given them a fair trial as yet. And we must get legislation to help us, if possible. I shall now ask Lord Cranbery to introduce me to the House of Lords,’ he went on, with a nervous laugh ; ‘I am beginning to see that there is work there also—work which at least I might *try* to do. I don’t know if it will be any good, but it will be better for me to fail than not to attempt it.’

‘I am glad you are beginning to feel like that,’ replied Lord Cranbery. ‘Of course you ought to take your proper place in the world. I don’t mean that you should abandon your aims, or launch out into extravagance, or anything of that sort.

Live as we do, eh, Celia?' turning to his wife. 'Nobody can accuse us of a deficient sense of duty, I am sure; but we owe duties to ourselves as well as to the world, you know!'

Bertie said no more, but went off into one of his reveries. As for Lady Nora, she seemed to have become all at once gay, as with a sense of newly awakened life.

CHAPTER L.

HOW IT ALL ENDED.

A FEW months had passed over, and the scheme was still absorbing much of the attention of the world. The principal newspapers had, at intervals, leading articles about it—some hopeful, some uncertain as to whether hope could in this instance be wisely indulged, and some uncompromisingly hostile, as having no manner of doubt that this was a foolish and mischievous attempt at making the masses of the people discontented with the position in which Providence had placed them.

The new feature of the situation was that the Marquis of Carabas—himself not long

ago a workman—had made a speech in the House of Lords. It was an eloquent and touching speech, dealing with the hardships of the poor and their possible remedies ; and it had been made in reply to a noble lord who had laboured to prove by figures and from history that you might as well endeavour to move Mont Blanc as to improve the condition of the lower orders.

The speech had been much talked of throughout all classes of society, and had even given the Marquis a new sort of interest to the class whereunto he now belonged. He was now frequently invited to great houses, but there was only one of these that he cared to visit.

This was no other than that which—as had been represented by witnesses then considered credible—he had been anxious to pillage.

At the house of the Duke of Dundridge he had become a frequent visitor, although the elder daughter of the family could not as

yet be induced to view his presence with equanimity. There was a good deal of talk in polite circles when his visits grew frequent—for was not Lady Nora Challoner still unmarried?

It would indeed be passing strange if a second Marchioness were to be selected from that noble family!

But strange events do occur every day ; and really it looked uncommonly like that sort of thing.

Wonderful woman, the Duchess, to be sure !

The rapid way in which she managed to overcome her prejudice against the plebeian youth, when it dawned upon her that there was a possibility of his laying his title and estates at the feet of that little commonplace Lady Nora, was wonderful and admirable in the highest degree. Rather amusing, by the way, that this same commonplace little daughter, who had always been snubbed and kept down by her ambitious mother, should

after all be the means of retaining in the family the title of Marchioness of Carabas. Well, one thing was certain : the Carabas money would be a perfect god-send to them all. It was beginning to be well known by this time that the Dundridge establishment was at its last gasp in a pecuniary sense.

But the Duchess ? She really was a marvellous woman ! That story now—the story of the young fellow saving the life of little Nora while he was as yet unconscious of the budding Marquis within him—was it to be taken literally, or was it not rather a pretty romance, woven out of the very slenderest materials ? At least it answered a purpose, and proved its *raison d'être*. And, after all, Lady Nora was just the sort of fresh, jolly, innocent, not too refined girl to suit a young fellow whose tastes were presumably those of the lower orders. And surely no one would grudge her the good fortune that was coming to her. She was certainly the most popular member of her family.

Little Lady Nora heeded not the flying rumours. She was as joyous and natural as ever, only there was decidedly a shade more of solemnity in her way of looking at life. She had made acquaintance with its seamy side, and the glittering tinsel of its surface had ceased to blind her to what lay beneath. The tragedy of her sister's life could not fail to cast a shadow, for a time, over her own.

Of late Lady Nora had greatly changed. By imperceptible degrees the soul's development had taken place ; and now, in place of a rudimentary, faun-like creature, who asked of life nothing save that she might be allowed to be happy in her own way, there was a full-grown human being, a woman who longed to understand, to sympathize, to be one with her kind, whether clothed in broad-cloth or in work-a-day fustian.

The Marquis had taken a house for his mother and for Nelly Dean at a pleasant spot situated midway between Hampton

Court and Kingston-on-Thames. It was a small house enough, as such houses go ; but to Bessie it still remained awful—representing to her simple fancy a grandeur such as she had never known. But for Bertie's sake she tried to make light of her feelings, and even affected to get over her awe of the magnificent footman who awaited her bidding, though she was as much afraid of giving him an order as was the fisherman who prostrated himself before the genii that emerged from the bottle he so uncautiously opened.

Jacob Dean could not rest long in this pleasant retreat. He must be in the thick of it, fighting the battle. He therefore lived on the Southwark side, not far from London Bridge, and in the midst of his work. A couple of shabby rooms was good enough for him. Once a week he would run up to the little Thames-side retreat and make them happy by his society.

Not that anything served to make poor

little Nelly really happy nowadays. There were times when all the luxury and beauty surrounding her grew loathsome in her eyes, and she would find herself wishing that she could again be the poor little cripple in Magnolia Street, watching the sunsets, and dreaming of the enchanted garden. Those were beautiful days indeed, although she had not appreciated them until they were gone irrevocably.

But now Lady Nora Challoner was an element of discord in her life. Much as she had liked that good-natured young lady while as yet unconscious of her high rank, the liking had all turned to gall and bitterness when the secret was out.

That little ordinary-looking girl the proud patrician whose charms had dazzled and captivated her Bertie? It was simply ridiculous!

After the superb and haughty — rather superhuman — vision created by the vivid imagination of the dreamer, Lady Nora did

indeed seem rather a poor specimen. Why, she wore plain cloth gowns, without a bit of trimming on them, and a stupid little straw hat, with nothing but a bunch of daisies in it—such a hat as Nelly, in her simplicity, fancied could be bought at any milliner's for about six shillings. Nelly felt it as a personal grievance that she should have found a rival in such a very unostentatious person as this particular Duke's daughter. She had been quite prepared to grind her teeth with malice, hatred, and envy at sight of the Duke's daughter of her dreams. But, at least, there would have been something gratifying to her pride in such a foe.

And the worst of it was that she had been cheated into liking Lady Nora before knowing that young lady's fault of birth. Warped and queer, and to some extent selfish, as the child was, her true nature was a passionate and loving one. This made it difficult for her to dislike what she had once loved. It was very, very hard to bear it all, though !

Now and again Lady Nora Challoner would come to visit them, Aunt Bessie and little Nelly ; and Bertie got to know the days, somehow, and then he would turn up also—in the most innocent and transparent manner—and three out of the four would wander over the lawn and down by the riverside, among the willows ; and sometimes Bertie would row Lady Nora up the Thames, and they would forget time and dinner and everything, until the sunset, flaming down into the stream, would warn them not to linger too long, even in Elysium.

At such times a little heart was torn, a little face turned pale with passion, and a little figure lay on one of the lounges in the drawing-room, worn out with its own emotions. Poor deformed, suffering Nelly, what a hopeless life was hers !

Bessie, without suspecting anything, had taken a great liking to Lady Nora, dating back from the period when that young lady visited her in trouble. Nothing gave the

simple woman greater delight than the presence of the bright, sunny-natured girl.

After due consideration, the Duchess regarded this sudden intimacy with wonderful complaisance. There was now no chance of Lady Nora ever marrying as her mother wished, since Lord Cranbery had lowered the family dignity, and slighted his own cousin, by his infatuation for that American creature. And of course everyone declared that the silly child had been jilted, even though Lord Cranbery—to do him justice—made it widely known that she it was who had declined the marriage. But, then, people would always so much rather believe it to be the woman than the man who had been thrown over! Headstrong Nora had therefore been decidedly damaged for the market matrimonial. This new adorer could not have chosen a more opportune moment to appear.

Perhaps—like Mr. Wilbraham Tweed—the clever woman of the world did not take unkindly to the notion of making a Marquis?

Certainly this young man could never attain sufficient audacity to question the authority of a mother-in-law upon matters domestic and social! He was but newly born, so to speak, into her world, and every statement she made must therefore be authoritative.

Foolish Bertie! Little he recked of what lay before him when he loitered under the trees with his mother's charming visitor one sunny afternoon in summer, whilst the bees kept up a continuous murmur in the branches of the limes overhead, and the river added to the music its deeper undertones.

Bertie and Lady Nora were alone; for Bessie, professing to be very busy, had retired within doors.

'This is such a day as I never even imagined in my old life,' said Bertie dreamily, lying on the short turf at Lady Nora's feet, and looking up through the branches at the hazy blue sky; 'I scarcely knew then that summer and sunshine made one happier.

It is a new experience, and a very, very pleasant one !

The girl looked at him with quick sympathy. What a hard, joyless, sunless life it must have been !

‘That does indeed seem strange,’ she answered, ‘not even to know the delight that lies in God’s glorious sunshine. And yet I suppose it is the fate of thousands ?’

‘Ay, and in a more complete fashion than it ever was mine ;’ and Bertie’s voice grew deep and pained for a moment ; then he went on more lightly, ‘but for me, I believe that I get more pleasure out of it all because of the deprivations of the past, so that there are compensations, you see !’

‘Your life is growing larger and fuller, then ?’

‘Is it not ? And yours — has it also altered ?’

‘I could never tell you how infinitely my horizon has widened since I first met you !’

Here Lady Nora started slightly, and bit

her lip. She had caught herself saying more than she meant to do. Bertie was quite ready to benefit by the slip. He took her hand in his, and found that it trembled a little.

‘Nora, dearest,’ he said softly, ‘is there any reason why we should not go through this always widening world together?’

Under his steadfast gaze Lady Nora was conscious of a crimson wave passing over her face and neck. That stupid, impetuous blood of hers—how impossible it was for her to keep it in order! If she had only not made that stupid speech!

‘You—you misunderstand me,’ she stammered, vainly endeavouring to steady her voice; ‘I did not mean—I did not mean——’

‘At any rate you know what *I* mean, Nora?’

She looked up, and again the tell-tale blood rose to her cheeks. Bertie had half risen from his reclining posture, and was now

kneeling close to her low chair. As their eyes met, a flash of mutual recognition passed between them. Another moment and Bertie's arms were round her, and his kisses were warm on her lips.

'My own, my darling,' he murmured in a voice deep with happiness, 'I love you—love you—love you! That is the truth I have longed to tell you. You have not known it, Nora; but ever since the first moment I saw you, you have been alone in my thoughts—a queen to be worshipped, a divinity to be adored!'

Lady Nora drew herself apart, and clapped her hands with a characteristic gesture.

'There! It *has* come at last, then? If I didn't always think and hope that some day an individual would appear who would have the odd taste to consider my snub nose divine and my stumpy figure delightful!' and Lady Nora laughed merrily. 'I do wonder what Cran would say if he heard anyone calling me—ugly, insignificant little

me—a queen and a divinity ! It does seem so extremely funny that I can't help laughing, Bertie ; but you mustn't think that it is because I've got no sentiment. It seems amusing, but, do you know, I rather like it ! Bertie dear, tell me : do you really — honestly — truthfully — think me rather—nice-looking ?'

The replies to such questions are not often given in words. There are quite as satisfactory ways of reassuring lovers as yeas and nays.

A short while, and the pair entered the room where Nelly lay on the sofa, torturing herself with vain imaginings. They were both deeply fond of the little creature, whom they still regarded as a child, having, fortunately for their contentment, no idea of the woman's heart that throbbed and ached beneath that childish exterior.

Nelly's perceptions were as quick as her power to feel. It needed no explanation to tell her all that had passed. She gasped

audibly, turned deathly pale, and placed her hand on her heart.

Lady Nora was by her side in a moment.

‘Oh, Nelly, what is it, dear?’ she asked, in alarm.

Nelly gasped for breath, but pushed aside the hands that would fain have raised her.

‘What does it matter about—me?’ she cried in a querulous voice. ‘I am sure you don’t really care—down in your heart! I am nothing to you—less than nothing!’

‘That is hardly kind, Nelly,’ murmured Lady Nora, half reproachfully, ‘when you know how we all love you, and how we would do anything in the world to save you pain.’

Nelly gave a wild, hysterical laugh.

‘That just shows how little you do know,’ she said; ‘but you were always like that—even in the hospital, when you tried to be kind—you never, never could understand me. It isn’t your fault though, after all,’ she went on, in a tolerant and condescending

way ; 'and perhaps it is as well. I don't want to be always making people unhappy.'

Lady Nora certainly did not at that moment understand the little self-tormentor, but she knelt beside the lounge, and drew the poor suffering head down upon her shoulder. At first Nelly seemed as though she would have repulsed the kindness ; but looking into the kind, frank face bending over her, something within seemed to melt all at once, and, in place of thrusting Lady Nora away as before, she threw her thin little arms around her friend's neck and burst into a flood of tears.

'It's no use,' she sobbed with passionate vehemence ; 'I've tried and tried to hate you, but it's no use ! You are too strong for me, in spite of your being stupid. You made me love you before—before I knew, and now it's too late for anything else. Take my little Bertie—I give him to you, mind—and

be very, very good to him ; and — and —’
here she drew Lady Nora’s head closer, and
whispered into her ear : ‘ don’t go and teach
him to forget poor little *me* !’

THE END.





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